

A
R E V I E W
OF THE
LIFE, CHARACTER AND WRITINGS
OF THE
REV. JOHN BIDDLE, M. A.

WHO WAS BANISHED TO THE ISLE OF SCILLY,
IN THE PROTECTORATE OF OLIVER CROMWELL,

BY JOSHUA TOULMIN, A. M. ✓

OTHERS HAD TRIAL OF CRUEL MOCKINGS AND SCOURG-
INGS: YEA, MOREOVER OF BONDS AND IMPRISONMENT;
OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY.

LONDON:

PRINTED MDCCXCI.

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W E V J E W

OF THE

THE CHARTERED AND WHARVES

OF THE

THE JOHN R. D. M. A.



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P R E F A C E.

THE character brought forward in the following memoirs was, more than an hundred years ago, a character of celebrity at home and abroad, The questions concerning the doctrine of the trinity, that have been lately agitated, properly render it an object of curiosity to the present age; for Mr. Biddle was the father of the *english unitarians*.

But his history is a more important object of attention, on account of the severe persecutions he sustained, and the amiable, venerable piety he exemplified. Memoirs of such as have displayed singular virtues, and supported singular sufferings, for what they deemed divine truth, will always be useful; to shew the power of religious principle, and to convince men, that true piety is not peculiar to those who embrace a particular

ticular creed, but the genuine fruit of those principles, which are common to all christians.

From these views is the author induced to lay before the public the life of Mr. BIDDLE, which he presumes cannot fail to prove, to the candid and serious mind, instructive and edifying. To the attention of such, and to the blessing of God, he would humbly commend it.

Taunton, March 22, 1789.

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R E V I E W

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LIFE, CHARACTER AND WRITINGS

OF THE

REV. JOHN BIDDLE, A. M.

SECTION I.

The Birth, Education, and First Settlement, of
MR. JOHN BIDDLE.

EXCELLENCE and merit of character are independent of the circumstances of rank and place: yet the mind is gratified by the information that can be procured, concerning the family and birth of such as have distinguished themselves by their virtues, or gained, in any walk of life, peculiar reputation.

The good man, whose character and writings will be reviewed in the following pages, derived no

lustre from the honours of his descent, nor can his family be traced back beyond the name and rank of his immediate progenitor. He was the son of Mr. Edward Biddle, a woollen-draper, at Wotton-under-edge, in the county of Gloucester; a person whose circumstances were not affluent, but who supported his family with a virtuous reputation, and a credit rather above his rank. His son, Mr. John Biddle, the subject of these memoirs, was born in that town, in the year 1615.

He received his classical education at the free-school in the same place. He was not ten years of age, when his promising abilities, and the opening blossoms of genius and probity, drew on him the notice of his neighbours, and spread his fame through the country. George lord Berkley, who was a munificent patron of genius and learning, conferred on him, amongst other scholars, an exhibition of ten pounds per annum; but with this mark of distinction, that he bestowed it on young Biddle, at a more early period than he was accustomed to grant this donation.

Our youth, animated by this encouragement, pursued his studies with new vigour. His emulation was kindled; so that, with ease, he not only surpassed his school-fellows of the same rank;

“ but

“but in time, out-ran his instructions, and became tutor to himself.”

In this period of his life he gave several particular specimens of the pregnancy of his parts, and his proficiency in learning. On the death of a school-fellow of high rank, he composed an elaborate oration in latin, which he recited before a full auditory. He also translated into english verse, the eclogues of Virgil, and the two first satires of Juvenal. We are led to entertain an high opinion of the execution of these juvenile performances, from this circumstance, that they were afterwards printed at London in 1634, with the approbation of some learned men, and dedicated to John Smith, Esq. of Nibley, in the county of Gloucester.

But notwithstanding the rapid and singular progress which he made in classical learning, he was, through different causes, detained at school till he was about seventeen years of age. In 1632 he was sent to the university of Oxford, and was admitted a student in Magdalen Hall. Here he prosecuted his studies with great assiduity and increasing fame; and was esteemed as doing honour to that seminary. It seems, that he now discovered not only a brilliancy of parts, but a peculiar liberality and independence of mind; for we are told, “he did so philosophize, that it might be ob-
served,

“ served, he was determined more by reason, than
 “ authority : however, in divine things he did not
 “ dissent much from the common doctrine.” Of
 this, it seems, that a little piece he wrote against
 dancing furnished proof.

On the 23d of June, 1638, he took the degree of bachelor of arts ; and with reputation, both for learning and prudence, filled the post of a tutor in the university. On the 20th of May, 1641, the degree of master of arts was conferred upon him with great applause. Before this he had received an invitation to be master of the school in his native town, which he declined. But the reputation which procured this offer, directed the views of the magistrates of Gloucester to him : as his having refused it, left him free to attend to other overtures. In 1641, in consequence of ample recommendations, from the principal persons in the university, he was elected master of the free school of Crisps, in the city of Gloucester. This choice was accompanied with earnest importunities. He accepted the invitation, and on his going to settle in this post, he was met at his approach to the city, by the magistrates, and was received with honourable expressions of joy and respect.

In this department he answered the expectations which had been formed of him. His skill and
 faith-

faithfulness were eminent. They, who could commit their sons to his tuition, congratulated themselves on their felicity. Hence, though the fixed salary was not great, the gratuities of parents made the emoluments of it considerable.

SECTION II.

The Freedom of his Religious Inquiries.

THE circumstances of Mr. Biddle's situation were truly inviting, and opened to him a pleasing prospect of usefulness and felicity. But his happiness in it was of short continuance. The love of money had not corrupted his mind: nor could the views of interest divert his attention from objects of a different nature. That freedom of inquiry which he had discovered in his philosophical and academical studies, was now directed to the subjects of religion. "Having laid aside the impediments of prejudice, he gave himself liberty," we are told, "to try all things, that he might hold fast that which is good."

To adopt the observations of a great writer, as pertinent here, as they are just in themselves.

"Since

“ Since the understandings of men are similar to one another, (at least so much, as that no person can seriously maintain that *two and two* make *five*,) did they actually read only the same things, and had they no previous knowledge to mislead them, they could not but draw the same general conclusions from the same expressions. But one man having formed an hypothesis from reading the scriptures, another, who follows him, studies that hypothesis, and refines upon it, and another again refines upon him; till in time the scriptures themselves are little read by any of them; and are never looked into but with minds prepossessed with the notions of others concerning them. At the same time several other *original readers* and thinkers, having formed as many other hypotheses, each of them a little different from all the rest, and all of them being improved upon by a succession of partisans, each of whom contributes to widen the difference; at last no religions whatever, the most distinct originally, are more different from one another, than the various forms of *one* and the same religion.

“ To remedy this inconvenience, we must go back to first principles. We must begin again, each of us carefully studying the scriptures for ourselves, without the help of commentators, comparing one part with another. And when our minds shall, by this means, have been exposed to the

the same influences, we shall think and feel in the same manner.

“ Were it possible for a number of persons to make but an essay towards complying with this advice, by confining themselves for the compass of a single year, to the daily reading of the scriptures, without any other religious books whatever; I am persuaded, that, notwithstanding their previous differences, they would think much better of one another than they had done before. They would all have more nearly the same general ideas of the contents, and of the chief articles of christian faith and duty. By reading the whole themselves, they could hardly avoid receiving the deepest impressions of the certainty, and importance of the great and *leading principles*; those which they would find most frequently and earnestly inculcated: and their particular opinions having come less frequently in view, would be less obstinately retained. It was in this manner, I can truly say, that I formed the most distinguishing of my opinions in religion*.”

In this manner it appears that Mr. Biddle formed those sentiments, by which he was afterwards distinguished. He gave the holy scriptures a diligent reading; and made use of no other rule to determine controversies about religion, than the

* Priestley's *Considerations on differences of opinion in religion*, p. 25, 26.

scriptures; and of no other *authentic interpreter*, if a scruple arose concerning the sense of the *scriptures*, than *reason*.*

This method of settling the mind on points of religious inquiry, he strongly recommended to others. "If thou, christian reader, dost from thy heart aspire to the knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ, wherein, as Christ himself testifieth, eternal life doth consist, John xvii. 3. fetch not the beginning thereof either from Socinus (a man otherwise of great understanding in the mystery of the gospel), nor from his adversaries; but being mindful of those words, Luke x. 22. *None knoweth who the son is but the Father; and who the Father is, but the son, and he to whom the son will reveal him*; lay aside, for a while, controversial writings, together with those prejudicate opinions that have been instilled into thine unwary understanding, and closely applying thyself to the search of the new covenant, most ardently implore the grace of Christ, that he would be pleased to manifest himself and the Father to thee; and make no doubt but the true light will at length illuminate the eyes of thy mind, that thou mayest walk in the way that leadeth unto life†.

* Life, p. 4. and Testimonies, p. 82. 12mo.

† See preface to a Discourse concerning the peace and concord of the church, p. 2, 3, 4.

So faithfully did Mr. Biddle himself pursue this plan of investigating divine truth, that he derived all his learning in matters of religion from the assiduous study of the scriptures, especially the new Testament; with which he was so conversant, that he retained it all in his memory *verbatim*, not only in english but in greek, as far as the fourth chapter of the Revelations. The natural consequence and advantage of this perfect and exact knowledge of the new Testament, it is obvious, must have been a comprehensive view of its contents, a familiar acquaintance with its language and phraseology, so as readily to compare it together as it occurred to his recollection from different places, and a command of the full connexion in which any passage stands.

It also appears, that when he first began to pursue religious inquiries, and to form his sentiments for himself, he did not, as many have, immediately read the first writers of the christian church. For, in a piece he afterwards published, having quoted some passages from Eusebius, he adds, "How plainly now doth Eusebius, by the passages cited out of him, give attestation to what I hold touching the nature of the holy spirit, so that one would think I learned it from him; whereas I knew not either of his book, or of what was delivered

livered therein, a great while after I had delivered my opinion*.

The tract where he thus expresses himself, shews indeed, that he afterwards carefully examined the fathers, to ascertain their sentiments concerning the one God : but it likewise proves, that he had a low opinion of their judgment, or of the weight of their testimony, which he used merely as an *argumentum ad hominem*.

It may be alledged, as a clear proof of the independence of Mr. Biddle's mind, and of his freedom from the influence of human authority, that he had read no socinian writer when he settled his judgment concerning the doctrine of the trinity ; though he afterwards looked into the polish writers of that class.

It is remarkable, that also the candid and excellent Dr. Lardner, who, amongst the writers of this century, takes a lead on the unitarian side, declares the same of himself. " I must acknowledge that I have not been greatly conversant with the writers of that denomination, (i. e. the socinians.) I have never read Crellius *de uno Deo Patre* : though I believe it to be a very good book.

* The Testimonies, p. 7. or the same in Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 27.

There

There is also in our own language a collection of Unitarian tracts, in two or three quartos. But I am not acquainted with it. Nor can I remember that I ever looked into it. I have formed my sentiments upon the scriptures, and by reading such commentators, chiefly, as are in the best repute. I may add, that the reading of the ancient writers of the church has been of use to confirm me, and to assist me in clearing difficulties*."

Whether these eminent and able persons, Biddle and Lardner, attained to the knowledge of the truth, every one must judge for himself. But this is certain, a method more proper in itself, or more promising of success, could not be adopted, than a diligent application to the only authoritative

* A Letter on the *Logos*, written in the year 1730, p. 33. Since the above was drawn up, the author has received a letter from a learned and judicious correspondent, a minister of an unitarian society amongst the baptists in Holland, who says the same of himself. "I was in the same case with Dr. Lardner, and could use his words. (See Lindsey's Two dissertations, p. 48.) To this time, I never had read Socinus, or socinian writers, before the works of Lindsey, by which my own sentiments are enlarged. I read, before the year 1775, no commentators, no ancient writers of the church. A year's studying the old and new Testament led me into the way of truth. My honoured master was an Arian, rather Clarkian. More than one of my friends, after my example, found the truth by reading alone the scriptures."

source of true information on the subject of their inquiry.

To return to Mr. Biddle. The temper, with which he prosecuted his inquiries, was suitable to the nature and importance of his researches.

As the lucrative prospects of his situation did not seduce him into an indifference to the knowledge of divine truth; so, we are told, that he was influenced in his pursuit of it, not by a vain curiosity, but by "the love of Christ, who is truth and life." His diligent reading of the scriptures was accompanied with fervent prayers for the divine illumination. The manner and strain of his address, prefixed to his Twelve Arguments, is a specimen and proof of that serious spirit which he possessed; and of the pious convictions under which his researches were conducted.

"Christian reader, I beseech thee," he writes, "as thou tenderest thy salvation, that thou wouldst thoroughly examine the following disputation in the fear of God, considering how much his glory is concerned therein*."

These arguments were not offered to the public with a decisive tone, and as the result of a fixed determination on the point, which is discussed in

* Twelve Arguments, the preface; or Unitarian tracts, v. 1, p. 16.

them ; but with the avowed design of calling forth some able and learned persons to investigate the question, and resolve his doubts.

“The author,” he says, “hath a long time waited upon learned men, for a satisfactory answer to these arguments ; but hath received none. His hopes are, that the publishing of them will be a means to produce it ; that he may receive satisfaction, and others may be held no longer in suspense, who are in travail with an earnest expectation as well as he.”

Upon Mr. Biddle's examination of the holy scriptures, it appeared to him, that the common doctrine concerning the trinity was not well founded in revelation, much less in reason. Being as communicative of his sentiments, when occasion offered, as he was free in his inquiries, he spake of his doubts without reserve, and opened his reasons for calling the truth of that doctrine into question. This discovery of his thoughts soon alarmed the fears, and inflamed the spirits, of some zealots. The charge of heresy was raised against him, and he was summoned before the magistrates ; to whom he exhibited, on the point about which he was accused, the following confession of faith, viz.

* Twelve Arguments, the preface, p. 45.

1. I believe that there is but one infinite and almighty essence, called God.

2. I believe, that, as there is but one infinite and almighty essence, so there is but one person in that essence.

3. I believe that our saviour Jesus Christ is truly God, by being truly, really and properly united to the only person of the infinite and almighty essence.

This confession was made May 2, 1644. It failed of giving satisfaction to the magistrates, who urged him to be more explicit concerning the plurality of persons in the divine essence. Accordingly, about four days after, knowing that the word *person*, when ascribed to the divine Being, was used in various senses, both by the ancient fathers and modern writers, he confessed, that there were three in that one divine essence, commonly termed persons.

"By this it appears," observes the author of his life, "that how distinct soever might be his conceptions concerning the trinity, yet he was not determinate enough in his expressing of that matter, as he became not long after." Mr. Biddle's second confession was indeed clearly contradictory to the first which he exhibited. But candour will make every allowance for a man, probably intimidated by the prospect of a prison, whose mind was

was not fully made up on a question involved in the intricacies of scholastic controversy, and whose holy fortitude was as yet in the first feeble stage of its exercise.

SECTION III.

His Tract entitled *Twelve Arguments*,

In whatever darkness or ambiguity the language of Mr. Biddle was involved, when he was summoned a second time, to make a confession of his faith; it reflects honour on his sincerity and fortitude, that, afterwards, he expressed himself with greater clearness and precision. Instead of desisting from inquiries which had already threatened, nay, endangered, his security and peace, he resumed them with new vigour, and with a serious spirit of piety and earnest prayer to almighty God for his assistance, he pursued his examination of the scriptures, on the point in dispute, with greater attention and care.

“A love of sacred truth is hardly consistent with an absolute indifference about its reception in the world.” The mind of Mr. Biddle, it appears,

pears, was as active to impart, as it was solicitous to gain the knowledge of divine things. His resolution to aver and communicate his conceptions kept pace with the convictions which he obtained on the points he investigated. For as he proceeded in his researches, he conferred with his friends on the subject and result of his inquiries, and freely opened his mind on the questions concerning one God and three persons.

Amongst other communications that he made to his acquaintance, was a paper, entitled, "*Twelve Arguments*, drawn out of the scripture, wherein the commonly received opinion touching the deity of the holy spirit is clearly and fully refuted." These arguments were drawn up in the form of so many syllogisms, and each was illustrated and supported by distinct explanations and reasonings.

To many, who with the author do not embrace the common doctrine of the trinity, his arguments, under those logical propositions, will appear to rest more on the sound of words, than to be derived from a liberal interpretation of scripture, and an enlarged acquaintance with its idioms and language.

They all proceed on this principle, and are meant to establish it, viz. that the holy spirit is a person or intelligent being. The same opinion of the distinct personality of the holy spirit has been

been advanced and defended by considerable writers *, who have denied his deity. But the most full and candid view of the language of scripture, on this head, has been given us by the excellent Dr. Lardner †.

The point elucidated and argued in this tract is, "that by the words, the *spirit*, the *spirit of God*, and the *spirit of the lord*, which occur in the old Testament, is meant, not a being or an intelligent agent; but a power, a gift, a favour, a blessing: and that by the phrases, the *spirit*, the *holy spirit*, the *holy ghost*, the *spirit of God*, the *spirit of truth*, the *comforter*, in the new Testament, is also meant a gift, or the plentiful effusion of miraculous and spiritual gifts." Were it not to incur the censure of dogmatizing, and using too decisive a tone, one would be tempted to pronounce this piece of Dr. Lardner's satisfactory and unanswerable.

* See Dr. Scott's Demonstration of the scripture doctrine of the trinity, and an Appeal to the common sense of all christian people.

† A letter concerning the Logos, written in the year 1790, the first postscript. The point has been very lately discussed, and closely argued in an ingenious little tract, entitled, "The Impersonality of the holy spirit. Printed for John Mason, 1787."

One remark of this great author deserves particular attention, and carries great force with it. It is this, "That there is not in the acts of the apostles, or in any other book of the new Testament, any account of the appearance and manifestation of a great agent or person, after our saviour's ascension; therefore no such thing was promised or intended by our saviour, or expected by the apostles, who could not but know his meaning.

This fact seems to have escaped the attention of those, who have argued for the personality of the holy spirit: nor have they made due allowance for the style of the holy scriptures, in which it is not uncommon to personify many things, to which we do not ascribe intelligence. In this view the expressions concerning charity, sin, and death, are as explicit and strong, as any that are applied to the holy spirit.

As to our lord's language in particular, it is on this point a very pertinent and sensible observation of a great writer: "That it is less extraordinary that the figure called *personification*, should be made use of by him here, as the peculiar presence of the spirit of God, which was to be evidenced by the power of working miracles, was to succeed in the place of a real person, viz. himself.

self, and to be to them what he himself had been, viz. their advocate, comforter, and guide*.

It was, it should seem, a long time, before the idea of the personality of the holy spirit became a fixed opinion, and an article of faith. For, as it is modestly expressed by Dr. Lardner, on a review of the christian writers of the first three centuries, "It is probable, that the doctrine of the trinity, which is now commonly received, and which is so much disliked by many, was not formed all at once, but was the work of several ages †.

To return to Mr. Biddle's tract. To it are subjoined expositions of some particular texts, the elucidation of which is connected with the questions discussed in the *twelve arguments*, it may be useful and acceptable, if we select one or two of these expositions.

For instance, 1 John v. 7. *And these three are one.* Mr. Biddle waves speaking of the suspectedness of the text, but observes: "That it would have been hard, if not impossible, (had not men been precorrupted) that it should ever come into any one's head to imagine, that this phrase, *are one*, did signify, *have one essence* :

* Dr. Priestley's History of the corruptions of christianity, vol. i. part 2. § 7. p. 88.

† The same, p. 90. and Lardner's Letter on the Logos, p. 107.

since

Since such an exposition is not only contrary to common sense, but also to other places of scripture, wherein this kind of speaking perpetually signifieth an union in consent and agreement, or the like, but never an union in essence. To omit other sacred writers, this very apostle in his gospel, ch. xvii. verses 11, 21, 22, 23, useth this same expression six times, intimating no other but an union of agreement: yea, in verse 8. of this very chapter in his epistle, he useth it in the same sense. For though the expression varieth somewhat in the ordinary greek Testament, in that the preposition *αἰς* is prefixed, (although the complutensian bible readeth it, *αἰς τοῦ ἐν ἑαυτῷ*, in both verses) yet is the sense the same; this latter being spoken after the hebrew idiom, the former according to the ordinary phrase: for confirmation whereof see Matt. xix. ver. 5 and 6. together in the original. Wherefore this expression ought to be rendered alike in both verses; as the former interpreters did it, though the latter interpreters in v. 8. have rendered it *agree in one*, putting the gloss instead of the translation*.

On Isaiah vi. 9, 10. Mr. Biddse observes that it is argued that the holy spirit is the Lord; because

* Twelve arguments, in 12mo, 1647. p. 19, 20. or Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 9.

On comparing this text with Acts xxviii. 25, 26, 27. that which in Isaiah is attributed to the Lord, is in the Acts ascribed to the holy spirit. which kind of arguing, though it be very frequent with them, is yet very frivolous: for at this rate, he adds, I may also conclude, that because what is attributed to the Lord, Exod. xxxiii. 11. is in the 7th verse of the same chapter ascribed to Moses: therefore Moses is the Lord. And because what is attributed to the Lord in Isaiah lxxv. 1. is in the 10th of Romans, verse 20. ascribed to Isaiah, therefore Isaiah is the Lord. And because what is attributed to God, 2 Tim. i. 8, 9. is by Paul attributed to himself, 1 Cor. ix. 22. and to Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 16. therefore Paul, yea, Timothy, is God*.

These remarks are capable of an extensive application in the dispute concerning the essence of Christ, and his equality with the Father. The last observation in particular, affects almost the whole series of arguments in vindication of that opinion.

The tract, of which we are now speaking, though originally drawn up for the perusal of his friends, and for private use, was followed with the

* As before, page 25, 27. or Unitarian tracts, v. i. p. 12.

most serious consequences to the author, and with a great revolution in his condition.

SECTION IV.

Proceedings against Mr. Biddle.

THERE is no act of iniquity to which false zeal hath not prompted men. It hath not only drawn the sword and kindled the fire, to restrain and punish what has been deemed heretical pravity, but, when open and obvious proofs of it have not lain against a person, by interrogatories and tortures, it hath extorted confessions on which to ground a conviction. It hath construed suspicions into proofs. It hath invited or disposed men to violate the confidence of friendship, and given a sanction to perfidy. Of this the history of Mr. Biddle furnishes a melancholy proof.

The *twelve arguments* noticed in the last section, were communicated among others, to one, who, while Mr. Biddle most probably thought him a sincere inquirer after truth, shewed himself unworthy of any confidence. For, instead of weighing the force of the reasoning, or endeavouring

ing, in the intercourses of private friendship, to convince Mr. Biddle of its fallacy, he was ungenerous enough to betray him to the magistrates of Gloucester, and to the committee of the parliament, that then resided there.

The consequence of this information being lodged against him was, that he was committed to the common goal, December 2, 1645. This commitment was cruel and peculiarly afflictive to him: for he was, at the time, ill of a dangerous fever. The design of his imprisonment was to secure his person, till the parliament should take cognizance of the affair. The severity of this proceeding, happily, was soon mitigated by the interposition of a compassionate friend, a person of eminence in Gloucester, who procured his enlargement, by giving bail for his appearance, when the parliament should see fit to call him to their bar.

About June, 1646, archbishop Usher, passing through Gloucester, in his way to London, had a conference with Mr. Biddle, respecting his sentiments concerning the trinity, and endeavoured to convince him that he was in an error, but without effect.

Six months after he was set at liberty, Mr. Biddle was summoned to appear at Westminster, and the parliament immediately chose a commit-

tee, to whom the cognizance of his cause was referred. Upon his examination he freely and candidly confessed, " That he did deny the commonly received opinion concerning the deity of the holy ghost, as he was accused; but that he was ready to hear what could be opposed to him, and if he could not make out his opinion to be true, honestly to acknowledge his error."

He was urged to declare his sentiments, concerning the deity of Christ, but he prudently waved the question, as not being to the point on which he was accused, and as it was a subject which he had not sufficiently studied, publicly to engage himself on it.

Though he endeavoured to have his affair brought to a conclusion on the single question, which alone was properly before his judges, no decision was passed, but he was wearied out by tedious and expensive delays. This induced him, at the distance of sixteen months from his first commitment, to address one of the committee, sir Henry Vane, in a letter dated April 15, 1647, in which he solicits and beseeches that gentleman, if he had any bowels towards the distressed, either to procure his discharge, or at least to make a report to the house, touching his denial of the supposed deity of the holy spirit.

In this letter he plainly and fully expressed his

ideas

ideas concerning the nature and offices of the holy spirit. "As for my opinion touching the holy spirit, it is that I believe the holy spirit to be the chief of all ministering spirits, peculiarly sent out from heaven, to minister on their behalf that shall inherit salvation; and I do place him, both according to the scriptures and the primitive christians, and by name Justin Martyr, in his apology, in the third rank after God and Christ, giving him a pre-eminence over all the rest of the heavenly host. So that as there is one principal spirit amongst the evil angels, known in scripture by the name of *satan*, or the *adversary**, or the *unclean spirit*, or the *evil spirit of God*†, or the *spirit of God*‡, or the *spirit*§ by way of eminence; even so there is one *principal spirit* (I borrow this appellation from the septuagint, who render the last clause of the 12th verse of psalm li. in this manner, *πνεύματι κυρίου σου στήριξόν με; spiritu principali fulci me; stablish me with thy principal spirit*) there is I say one principal spirit, amongst the good angels, called by the name of the *advocate* or the *holy spirit*, or the *spirit*§, by way of eminence.

* 1 Pet. 5. 8.

† Zech. 13. 2.

‡ In support of the application of these terms to *satan*, Mr. B. refers to 1. Sam. xvi. 15, 16, and last verse; and 1 Kings, xxii. 21. See the original.

§ John xvi. 7. Ephes. iv. 30. Neh. ix. 20. 1 Cor. vii. 40. Acts x. 19.

This opinion of mine is attested by the whole tenor of the scripture, which perpetually speaketh of him as differing from God, and inferior to him *.

Then, after an enumeration of many texts, which in his apprehension, decidedly supported his sentiments, he adds some pertinent reflections on the importance of the question, and the nature of the proceedings against him.

"Behold now," says he, "the cause for which I have lier under persecution, raised against me by my adversaries, who being unable to justify by argument their practice of giving glory to the holy spirit, as God, in the end of their prayers, since there is neither precept nor example for it in all the scripture, and being taxed by me for giving the glory of God to another, and worshipping what he hath not commanded, nor ever came into his heart, have in a cruel and unchristian manner resorted to the arm of flesh, and instigated the magistrate against me, hoping by his sword (not that of the spirit) to uphold their will-worship; but in vain, since every plant that the heavenly Father hath not set shall be rooted up. And that the practice of worshipping the

* Twelve arguments. Letter to a member of parliament, p. or Unitarian tract, vol: 1. p. 13.

holy spirit of God, as God, is such a plant as God never set in his word, would soon appear to the honourable house, could they be so far prevailed with, as, having laid aside all prejudice, seriously to weigh the many and solid proofs that I produce for my opinion out of the scripture, together with the slight, or rather no proofs of the adverse party for their opinion; which they themselves know not what to make of, but that they endeavour to delude both themselves and others with personalities, modes, substances, and such like brain-sick notions, that have neither sap nor sense in them, and were first hatched by the subtilty of Satan in the heads of platonists, to pervert the worship of the true God.

“ Neither could this controversy be set on foot in a fitter juncture of time than this, wherein the parliament and the kingdom have solemnly engaged themselves to reform religion both in discipline and doctrine. For, amongst all the corruptions in doctrine, which certainly are many, there is none that more deserveth to be amended than this, that so palpably thwarteth the whole tenour of the scripture, and trencheth to the very object of our worship, and therefore ought not to be lightly passed over by a man that professeth himself a christian, much more a reformer. God is jealous of his honour, and will not give it to another;

we therefore, as beloved children, should imitate our heavenly Father therein, and not upon any pretence whatsoever depart from his express command, and give the worship of the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth to him whom the scripture no where affirmeth to be God.

“ For my own particular, after a long impartial inquiry of the truth, in this controversy, and after much and earnest calling upon God, to give unto me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; I find myself obliged, both by the principles of reason and scripture, to embrace the opinion I now hold forth, and as much as in me lyeth, to endeavour that the honour of almighty God be not transferred to another, not only to the offence of God himself, but also of his holy spirit, who cannot but be grieved to have that ignorantly ascribed to himself, which is proper to God that sends him, and which he no where challengeth to himself in scripture.

“ What shall befall me in the pursuance of this work, I refer to the disposal of almighty God, whose glory is dearer to me, not only than my liberty, but than my life. It will be your part, honoured sir, into whose hands God hath put such an opportunity, to examine the business impartially, and to be an helper to the truth, considering that this controversy is of the greatest importance

portance in the world, and that the divine truth suffers herself not to be despised scot-free.

“ Neither let the meanness of my outward presence deter you from stirring, since it is the part of a wise man, as in all things, for especially in matters of religion, not to regard so much who it is that speaketh, as what it is that is spoken; remembering how our saviour in the gospel saith, that God is wont to hide his secrets from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto children. In which number I willingly reckon myself, being conscious of my own personal weakness, but well assured of the evidence and strength of the scripture to bear me out in this cause *.”

The effect of this pious and humble remonstrance was, that sir Henry Vane, to whom it was addressed, shewed himself a friend to Mr. Biddle, and reported his case to the house. The result was not favourable to Mr. Biddle's comfort and liberty, for he was committed to the custody of one of the officers of the house of commons, and he was continued under this restraint for the five following years. In the mean time the matter was referred to the consideration of the assembly of divines, then sitting at Westminster, before

* Twelve arguments. The Letter written to a certain Knight; p. 6, 7, 8. or *Uninstructed*, vol. 1. p. 14, 15, 16.

some of whom he often appeared, and gave them, in writing, his twelve arguments against the deity of the holy spirit.

The answer to his arguments, which he received at any of these interviews, was not satisfactory or convincing to his mind. This induced him to print them in the year 1647, in hopes that the publication of them would not only give the world a fair state of his case, but excite attention to the question. It was accompanied with an address to the impartial reader, signed J. H. in which the writer expressed his own and the author's earnest hope, that the publication of these arguments would engage some one to attempt a solid reply to them; such a reply, as would not merely tax his arguments with being weak and invalid, but, by clear and strong reasonings, would refute them, and carry conviction to inquisitive and doubting minds: A reply, that did not substitute railing for argument, and supply the deficiency of its proofs by the bitterness of its invectives. "At these rates," he observed, "the weakest man might easily subvert the strongest controversy."

This preface also bespoke and intreated the reader's very serious attention to the arguments laid before him; "as to a matter which affected the divine glory, and his own salvation:" the au-

thor requested him "at any hand to forbear condemning his opinion as erroneous, till he was able to bring pertinent and solid answers to all his arguments."

To suppress the piece, and to prohibit the progress of inquiry, it was justly observed, could "no ways unscruple doubting spirits:" amongst whom for the present the writer numbered himself, expecting an answer to these ensuing arguments, adding, in the language of a pious and ingenuous mind; and that "God will be with him that undertaketh it, and write in a spirit of meekness, and of wisdom, in the revelation and knowledge of truth, shall be the matter of his prayers, who desires the truth may be cleared up, and shine like the noon-day, and all error confounded, and vanish before truth, like a mist before the sun." J. H.*

The publication of this tract raised a great alarm, and it was called in and burnt by the common hangman. But this illiberal mode of suppressing the work, and stifling inquiry, had only a short and temporary effect. This piece, with two other tracts, was reprinted by the author in 1653, and it was published a third time, amongst the Unitarian tracts, in 4to, in the year 1691. To which the life of the author was prefixed.

* Twelve arguments, in 12mo. 1647.

SECTION V.

Mr. Biddle publishes his *Confession of Faith*, and *Testimonies of the Fathers*.

MR. Biddle appears to have possessed a firmness of mind, which not only supported him under the dark clouds that gathered round him, but enabled him to pursue his inquiries, and to publish, with steadiness and freedom, his sentiments concerning the points for which he suffered. For, being yet in prison, he printed, in 1648, a *Confession of faith concerning the holy trinity*, according to the scripture, with the *Testimonies of several of the fathers on this head*.

In the conclusion of the preface to the *Confession of faith*, he frankly expresses himself on the design of this publication, and the importance of its object. "I have," says he, "here presented you with a *Confession of faith* touching the holy trinity, exactly drawn out of the scriptures, with the texts alledged at large, that so you may the better judge how suitable the same is to the word of God.

"Neither have I other aim in the publication thereof than to restore that pure and genuine knowledge of God delivered in the scripture, and
which

which hath for many hundred years been hidden from the eyes of men, by the corrupt glosses and traditions of Antichrist, who hath instead thereof obtruded upon them I know not what absurd and uncouth notions, bearing them in hand that ignorance is the mother of devotion, and that they then think and speak best of God, when their conceits and words are most irrational and senseless. By which means, having renounced those quiddities and strange terms, that have vitiated the simplicity of the scripture, and having laid asleep the contentations arising from them, we shall at length unanimously with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ*."

The preface, which closes with the preceding paragraphs, is occupied with a full representation of the evils, of which Mr. Biddle conceived the doctrine of the trinity had been productive, having, as he expresseth it, "not only made way for the idolatrous pollutions of the Roman Antichrist, but, lying at the bottom, corrupteth almost our whole religion."

To illustrate and confirm this assertion, he observes, that the common opinion touching three

* See the Confession of faith, 12mo. 1648, or Unitarian tracts, 4to. v. 1. tract ii. 1691.

persons in God, subverteth the unity of God, so frequently inculcated in the scripture; and that it hindereth men from praying according to the pre-script of the gospel, which instructs us to ask of God the holy spirit, and to pray to him through his son Jesus Christ, which implieth that God is the Father only.

He also considers the tenet of three persons in God as incompatible with the love and honour which we owe to the most high God; this is the *highest* love and honour that it is in our power to exercise, and of which *one person only* can be the object, who can be the *Father only*; for the son and spirit, as the names import, deriving from him, can be only secondary objects of honour and love; in subordination to the Father, and with reference to the powers and characters received from him.

He represents it as another consequence of the common opinion, that it thwarteth the idea, which men naturally entertain of God, as the Being who is the first cause of all things, existing of himself only, and all others from him. It looks, therefore, like an attempt to deprive men of their understanding, and in a point of the greatest importance, to ascribe supreme deity to two other persons besides the Father, i. e. to ascribe the character of the first cause, of self-existence,

existence, to beings who are caused; or, according to the orthodox style, to the son, who is begotten of the Father, and to the holy spirit, which proceedeth from both.

Another consequence of this doctrine, he also remarks, is, that it is a stumbling-block to the ancient people of God, the jews, and is a bar to their reception of christianity, "For they, having formerly smarted for their idolatry, are now grown exceeding cautious of a tenet looking that way." He concludes with remonstrating on the effect which the doctrine of the trinity has, in impeding the accomplishment of the prophecy long since delivered by Zechariah, ch. xiv. 9. "In that day the Lord shall be one, and his name ONE." Whereas, the partisans of this doctrine contend, that the Lord is three, calling him *Deum trinum*, and that his name is not *One*, but three; even the Father, the son, and the holy ghost.

Having thus freely arraigned the common doctrine of the trinity, the author, in the following treatise, states and endeavours to establish his own ideas on the subject. This he does under the form of six articles or propositions, each of which is separately illustrated by a full discussion of the principles it exhibits, and by a copious display of reasonings and divine authorities in proof of its truth.

A selection of the three first articles may be entertaining and instructive, as well as furnish a specimen of this performance.

I. " I believe that there is one most high God, creator of heaven and earth, and first cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently the ultimate object of our faith and worship; and that this God is none but the Father of our lord Jesus Christ, the first person of the holy trinity.

II. " I believe that there is one chief son of the most high God, or spiritual, heavenly, and perpetual lord and king, set over the church by God, and second cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently the intermediate object of our faith and worship; and that this son of the most high God is none but Jesus Christ, the second person of the holy trinity*.

III. " I believe that Jesus Christ, to the intent he might be our brother, and have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities, and so become the more ready to help us (the consideration whereof is the greatest encouragement to piety that can be imagined), hath no other than a human nature, and therefore in this very nature is not only a person (since none but an human person can be our brother), but also our lord, yea, our God."

* See p. 42. on the use of this word "trinity."

Were we to lay before the reader the illustrations and proofs brought forward, under every article, we must re-publish the tract at full length; yet it may be acceptable to point out some remarks which are recommended to our attention by their novelty, or importance, or force.

Under the first article he considers the text, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*, as addressed to the holy spirit, whom he conceives to be represented in verse 2. Ps. civ. 30. and Job xxvi. 13. as the instrument of God in the creation; upon which he starts this question: "Had the son of God, Christ Jesus, been also employed in creating Adam, would he not likewise have been mentioned in the history of the creation? Was it not as material, and altogether of as great consequence, for Moses and the jews to have known, that the son of God, Christ Jesus, was employed by God, in creating Adam, as the holy spirit?"

He grants that the holy scripture attributeth creation to Christ; but then he remarks, that by the nature of the thing itself, by the circumstances of the places, and by express words, it appears that not the first but second creation, or the reduction of things into a new state or order, is meant.

He argues that Christ expressly precludes our conceiving of him as the creator of Adam, when

he ascribes it to another being, Matt. 19. 14. in that description, *HE that made them*. He considers this notion as totally incompatible with the language of Peter and Paul concerning Christ: the former speaking of him as *fore-ordained*, or *fore-known* before the foundation of the world; which can be said only of things that are to come, and are not already in being. The latter, Rom. v. 14. describing *Adam as the type of him that was to come*, or as the greek, *was to be*, *μελλωνος*. Could Adam be a type of a being already existing? or was the creator of Adam yet to be; as yet to exist? or can it be said of any one, that *he is to be*, when he is already in being.

Under the second article, he argues that Phil. 2. 5. cannot be understood to speak of what is called the incarnation; because the apostle exhorting the Philippians to humility, from the example of Christ, must be supposed to draw his argument from some instance that was conspicuous, and had been visible to sight and contemplation, which the incarnation could not be. He further urges, that, in this passage, the apostle speaks of our lord only as a man.

On 1 Cor. viii. 6. *By whom are all things*, he remarks, by *all things* are not here meant all things simply, but all things pertaining to our salvation, as is evident from this, that the apostle
speaketh

speaketh of christians, and putteth an article before the word *all* in the greek, which implieth restriction*.

In discussing the third article concerning the strict humanity of Christ, having quoted 2 Tim. ii. 5. John iii. 13. vi. 62. viii. 40. iii. 14. 15. Matt. ix. 6, 7, 8. Matt. xvi. 27, 28. Dan. vii. 13, 14. he observeth, "that the most excellent things, which are in the scripture, attributed to Christ, are attributed to him not only under the notion, but also under the very name of a *man*."

In the title of the tract, which we are reviewing, stands the word *trinity*, and it frequently occurs in the following pages, as a term adopted by the author to convey a scriptural truth. This, considering the main drift and tendency of the treatise, may surprize the reader. It may, certainly, be concluded from hence, that he had no objection to the use of the word; whether it was done with a design more easily to insinuate his ideas of the scripture doctrine on this point, viz. that it consisteth of *one God, one lord, and one spirit*; or whether it proceedeth from the mere force of early habit, which often last of all permits us to give up words, though we may long before have discarded the ideas generally affixed to them.

* διὸ καὶ πάντα.

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But it is not duly considered that the use of words, to which custom has long affixed a peculiar sense, will continue to awaken in the mind those ideas which they have generally been employed to express; and that the force of the old meaning will prevail over any gloss or interpretation, with which we may accompany them. Would we get rid of error, we must lay aside the *terms* under which it has been clothed, as well as explode the ideas themselves. At least this should be done with respect to such terms as, like the word "trinity," have no sanction from the language of scripture, but are surely human inventions.

Mr. Biddle's confession of faith was soon succeeded by another tract, entitled, *The TESTIMONIES of Iræneus, Justin Martyr, Novatianus, Theophilus* (who lived the two first centuries after Christ was born, or thereabouts) as also *Arnobius, Lactantius, Eusebius, Hilary, and Brightman*; concerning that one God and the persons of HOLY TRINITY. Together with observations on the same, printed at London.

It may appear inconsistent with the avowed principles of Mr. Biddle, who professed to derive his sentiments solely from the scriptures, that he should make an appeal to human testimonies. The reason and propriety of his adopting this mode

mode of arguing are stated by himself at the close of this piece.

“ Those human testimonies above-written have I alledged, not that I much regard them as to myself (who make use of no other *rule* to determine controversies about religion, than the *scripture*; and of no other authentic *interpreter*, if a scruple arise concerning the sense of scripture, than *reason*) but for the sake of the adversaries, who continually crake *the fathers, the fathers*. And though such of them as dissent from the church of Rome, lay aside this plea, when they have to do with papists about sundry points of controversy; yet do they take it up again, in a manner waving the scripture, when they argue with me.

“ For it is apparent that the fathers of the two first centuries, or thereabouts, when the judgments of christians were yet free, and not enslaved with the determinations of councils, asserted the Father only to be that one God, and so were in the main right as to the faith concerning the HOLY TRINITY, however they went awry in imagining two natures in Christ, which came to pass, (as we before hinted) partly because they were great admirers of Plato, and accordingly (as Justus Lipsius somewhere saith) did in *outward profession so put on Christ*, as that in heart they did not put off Plato, wittily applying his high notions

tions, touching the creation of the world, to what was simply and plainly spoken of the man Christ Jesus, in relation to the gospel by the apostle John; partly that they might thereby avoid the scandal of worshipping a *crucified man*, a thing then very odious amongst the jews and pagans, and now amongst deluded christians *,"

Amongst other passages cited by Mr. Biddle from the ancient christian writers, is that from Justin Martyr, lately quoted by Dr. Priestley, whose inferences from it have been controverted by his opponents. It may therefore be acceptable to the reader, if we lay before him Mr. Biddle's translation of the passage, and remarks on it.

"Nevertheless, O TRYPHON, said I, this remaineth safe, that such a one is the Christ of God, although I cannot demonstrate that he was, before, the son of the maker of all things, being a god, and was born a man by the virgin, it being every way demonstrated that he is the Christ of God, whosoever otherwise he shall be found to be. But if I shall not demonstrate that he did pre-exist, and according to the counsel of the Father endured to be born a man of like affections with us, being endued with flesh, it is just and fit to say that I am mis-

* The Testimonies, &c. printed in 12mo. p. 83, 84. or Unitarian tracts, 4to. v. 1. tract 4. p. 30.

taken in this only, and not to deny that he is the Christ, if he appear to be a man born of men, and to become the Christ by election.

“ For there are some dear friends, said I, of our kind, who confess him to be the Christ, yet hold him to be a man born of men. To whom I assent not; no, though very many of the same opinion with me should speak it, since we are commanded by Christ himself not to hearken to the doctrines of men, but to such things as have been promulgated by the prophets of happy memory, and taught by himself.

“ And TRYPHON replied, They that say he was a man, and according to election anointed and made Christ, methinks speak more probably, than you who say such things as you relate. For all we expect that the Christ shall be a man of men.”

On this passage Mr. Biddle offers some strictures. “ Observe here,” christian reader, “ that Justin Martyr did not think it inconsistent that Jesus should be the Christ, although he had no other than the human nature. Secondly, that divers christians, whom Justin himself owned for such, for he saith that they were of the same kind, and opinion with him, did then *de facto* affirm that Jesus, whom they counted the Christ, had none but a human nature. Both which were in the succeeding age by Athanasius, and since by other

other such furious zealots, stiffly denied, and he pronounced utterly incapable of eternal life, who should not believe, not only that Christ had another nature, but (what neither Justin Martyr, nor any other of the christians, who lived in the two first centuries, and whose works are extant, ever did affirm) that that other nature was the very nature of the most high God. Thirdly, that the jews (who would be happy, were their opinion, concerning the kingdom of Christ, as true as that they hold concerning his nature) did not believe that the Christ who was to come, should be other than a man*."

SECTION VI.

A cruel ordinance obtained against Mr. Biddle.

IT is not supposable that these pieces of Mr. Biddle could be published without drawing a great odium on their author, or that this attack on prevailing and established opinions, could be made without raising indignation against him. At that

* Testimonies, p. 24, &c. ed. in 12mo. or, Unitarian tracts, v. i. tract iv. page 9, 10, 18.

time the supreme power was solely in the hands of the parliament, the episcopalian hierarchy had been overturned, and in the room of it had succeeded a presbyterian and ecclesiastical government, the high court of which sat at Westminster, and consisted of an assembly of divines. These took the alarm at the appearance of Mr. Biddle's writings; and, instead of applying themselves to the refutation of his sentiments by a candid and solid answer to his arguments, they applied to the civil power, and supplied the defect of their own exertions by recourse to its commanding terrors. They preferred the carnal to the spiritual weapon, and found a more expeditious and popular remedy against the rise of heresy, in the use of the sword, than in that of the pen.

They accordingly solicited the interference of the parliament, and prevailed with it to pass an ordinance for the punishing of blasphemies and heresies; from which Mr. Biddle's life was in great danger; for though it took a wide compass, and was formed to reach a variety of opinions, yet it was evidently pointed, in particular, against the notions which he had advanced.

This ordinance was directly pointed against such as, in any mode, should not only deny the being, omnipresence, fore-knowledge, almighty power, holiness and eternity of God; but who

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should

should, by preaching, printing, or writing, contravert the deity of the son, or of the holy spirit, or the equality of Christ with the Father, or the distinction of two natures, the godhead and humanity, or the sinless perfection of his humanity, and the meritoriousness of his death in behalf of believers; or that any of the books, commonly deemed canonical, were not the word of God. It pronounced those, who offended in any of these instances, guilty of felony, and doomed them, if convicted on confession, or on the oaths of two witnesses, before two justices, to imprisonment, without bail or mainprize, until the next gaol-delivery, when the witnesses were bound to give evidence, and the party were to be indicted for feloniously publishing and maintaining such error. It then enacted, that in case the indictment should be found, and the party on his trial should not abjure the same error, and maintenance and defence of the same, he should suffer *the pains* of DEATH, as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.

It appointed the same process, and decreed the same sentence against those who had been formerly indicted on the same grounds, and after having abjured their error, should again publish and maintain the same.

If the sanction by which this ordinance enforced

forced other determinations, wore a milder aspect, what was wanting in the severity of its sentence, was counterbalanced by the rigour with which it extended and multiplied its decisions. To maintain and publish that all men should be saved; that man hath by nature free will to turn to God; that the soul dieth or sleepeth after the body is dead; that revelations or workings of the spirit are a rule of faith; that man is bound to believe no more than by his reason he can comprehend; that the two sacraments of baptism and the lord's supper, are not ordinances commanded by the word of God; that baptising infants is unlawful, or such baptism is void, and that such persons ought to be baptised again, and in pursuance thereof shall baptise any person formerly baptised; that the observation of the lord's day, as it is enjoined by the laws and ordinances of this realm, is not according to, or is contrary to, the word of God; or that it is not lawful to join in public prayer or family prayer, or to teach children to pray; or that the churches of England are no more churches, nor their ministers and ordinances true ministers and ordinances; or that the church government by presbytery is unlawful, or antichristian; or that magistracy, or the power of the civil magistrate by law established in England, is unlawful, or that all use of arms, though for the public defence, (and

though the cause be never so just) is unlawful. To advance or maintain any of these opinions incurred, by this ordinance, imprisonment till the party should find two sufficient sureties, before two justices of the peace, one of them to be of the quorum, that he would not publish or maintain the same error or errors any more *.

The enumeration of the opinions condemned by this ordinance (some of which are omitted in this review) is so minute, and full and pointed, as plainly to speak this language: "Our principles form an unerring standard, and not any deviation from it, in one instance, is or shall be admitted." No decree of any councils, no bull of any pope could be more dogmatical, or authoritative; few, if any, have been more sanguinary.

Besides the severity of the penalties, which it denounced, the mode of process which it appointed was arbitrary and repugnant to the constitution of this country in particular, as well as opposite to

* See Crosby's History of the english baptists, vol. 1. p. 199. 205. or British biography, vol. 6. p. 82. 84. This ordinance is also preserved in "A Collection of acts and ordinances of general use, made in the parliament begun and held at Westminster, the 9d of November, 1648, and since unto the adjournment of the parliament begun and holden the 17th of September, 1656, being a continuation of that work from the end of Poulton's collection." By Henry Scobell, esq. clerk of the parliament. Folio 1658.

the general principles of equity and justice: for it allowed neither the privilege of a jury, nor the liberty of an appeal. Such is the operation of religious bigotry.

The truth, indeed is, that bigotry, though never amiable nor reasonable, is comparatively an harmless thing, when it exists only in individuals who are not armed with the power of the sword, nor can act with an united and combined influence and authority. The alliance of the church with the state, gives the sting to this intolerant and baneful temper; and it matters little, whether the leaders in the church support the rank of bishops, or move only in the humble post of presbyters.

Both episcopacy and presbyterianism adopt one grand error, productive of two great evils, which generate ten thousand more, all nefarious. The great and fountain error is the considering of *conscience*, as a subject of human government. This notion produces two great evils. 1. LEGISLATION; now all human legislation is oppressive to conscience, and it is immaterial where this power is lodged. It is TYRANNY any where. 2. Enforcing laws made by Jesus, by penal sanctions. In popery and episcopacy both the legislative and executive power are lodged in the same person. Presbyterianism is exactly like them, and only swears the civil magistrate to do the worst part.

of the work. From these two evils, making laws for conscience and then executing them, or executing laws made by Jesus Christ, by coercive measures, proceed confusion and every evil work*."

The conduct of the presbyterians, during the short period, when they were in alliance with the supreme powers of this country, verifies the truth of these remarks. In reference to *their* measures, Milton had every reason to say with satyrical poignancy, "New presbyter is but old priest wrote large."

For the ordinance, now before us, was only one, out of several public acts, that breathed the same intolerant, dogmatical spirit; and had the same baneful aspect on the inquiries of the candid, and on the rights of conscience.

The fact is, that the question concerning the rights of conscience, had not been brought into a discussion; or, at least, the inquiry was only in its infancy. The object of contest, between the episcopalians and presbyterians, had been, not to establish and enlarge the general liberty, but to gain power to themselves, and to give security to their own professions and opinions, under an idea

* Robinson's Plan of lectures on the principles of nonconformity. 5th ed. 1781. p. 39, 40.

that their own creed, their own mode of worship alone, was scriptural; and, when established, was to be maintained and protected by all the efforts of authority.

In the course of the contest, the presbyterians, for a few years, gained the superiority. All those measures were then right, which before they felt to be unjust and oppressive; because now they were used in the cause of God and truth. Power blinded and corrupted *them*, as it had done before the episcopalians. An ecclesiastical hierarchy, in every nation, in every age, under all civil revolutions, has been inimical to truth, and a bar to reformation.

In Scotland the presbyterian hierarchy is meliorated by its neighbourhood to this country, and its union with the episcopalian hierarchy under the same king. But in Geneva, and in Holland, where it reigns, exempt from the influence and controul of a different and powerful body of men, it is by no means favourable to liberty and free inquiry. The severity of the placarts, in the latter of these countries, has been a bar to the translation of the *Memoirs of the life and writings* of Faustus Socinus into Dutch. No bookseller there having the courage to appear as the publisher of it. At Dort, the translation of Dr. Priestley's *History of the corruptions of christianity* has been strictly prohibited.

prohibited. And it may, on good information, be asserted, that the sermons of the established clergy of Holland have, in general, little of any moral instruction; but the strain of them is dogmatical and intolerant.

It is an honour to the english protestant dissenters of this day, and a ground of devout thankfulness, that presbyterianism hath no existence amongst them. They who, very improperly, are called presbyterians, as consistent protestants, and as genuine advocates for liberty, have no rivals, and but few equals.

But it is time to drop this subject, and to return to Mr. Biddle, to whom, it was expected that the ordinance, which has led us into these reflexions, would have proved fatal. Had it been more confined in its direction, it could scarcely have failed of being destructive to him. But its force was directed to so many objects, and so various, that it would have involved, in the execution of its sentence, many whom not only policy taught, but necessity constrained, them to spare. For, in the army, from which quarter the authority of parliament met with considerable opposi-

* See to this effect the animated and eloquent discourses delivered before the friends of the New Academy at Manchester, in 1786, particularly Mr. Harrison's sermon, p. 25, &c.

tion, numbers, both of soldiers and officers, were liable to the severities of this act. On this account, and because there was a dissension in the parliament itself, it lay unregarded for several years.

SECTION VII.

Mr. Biddle's Sufferings from 1648 to 1651. His subsequent enlargement and improvement of it.

THOUGH the circumstances noticed in the close of the last section enervated, to a great degree, the force of that shocking ordinance, which was aimed at Mr. Biddle's life, yet he suffered for several years, the miseries of a severe imprisonment. It derived, however, some mitigation, and indeed, enlargement through the death of Charles I.

In the subsequent confusion of the times, arising from the opposition that the commonwealth met with from the royalists, the scots and the irish, and from the conduct of the presbyterians towards the new government, the attention of the parliament and of the presbyterians was naturally drawn off from religious disputes to the establishment of their power and influence in the political scale.

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The parliament also interfered with explicit and direct exertions in favour of toleration.

For Cromwell, before he embarked for Ireland, which he was appointed to reduce, sent letters to the parliament, urging the repeal of all the penal laws relating to religion. His application was supported by a petition from general Fairfax, and his council of officers, praying that all penal statutes formerly made, whereby many conscientious people were molested, might be removed. This petition was favourably received, and, after some time, passed into a law.

Though it does not appear that Mr. Biddle, in consequence of this, was dismissed from prison by a legal and official discharge, yet, for the present, these measures were favourable to him. His keeper allowed him more liberty, and permitted him, upon security being given, even to go into Staffordshire. Here the obloquy and confinement, which he had suffered, were, in some degree, soothed and counterbalanced, by the patronage and kindness of a justice of the peace, who received him into his house, courteously entertained him, made him his chaplain, and appointed him to be a preacher of a church in that county, and at his death left him a legacy; which was a very seasonable supply to him, as he had already spent nearly all his substance in about four years charge-
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able restraint*. One regrets, that the memoirs of Mr. Biddle have not perpetuated the name of the gentleman who acted this excellent part. He evidenced a laudable superiority to vulgar prejudices, in not being ashamed of this persecuted man; and he manifested a christian benevolence and fortitude, in affording to him his patronage, and in ministering to his wants. It is a pleasing thought, that though the names of those who perform such good deeds, should be lost to the world, they are on everlasting record in the books of heaven.

Mr. Biddle was not long permitted to enjoy the ease and comfort of his friendly asylum, for sir John Bradshaw, president of the council of state, being informed of his retreat, issued out orders for his being recalled, and more strictly confined. In this long confinement, which lasted to February, 1651, what proved most grievous to him, was that by reason of his lying under the imputation of blasphemy and heresy, the minds of people were either so alienated from him, or so intimidated with an apprehension of incurring the same odium, should they shew him any kind and respectful attention, that he was cut off from all the intercourses of life, and could hardly have

* British Biography, v. 6. p. 85.

any one to converse with. In particular, no divine, except Mr. Peter Gunning, afterwards bishop of Ely, during his seven years confinement, ever paid him a visit, not even to attempt to convince him of his errors. A good man, suffering for conscience and his love of truth, must be very sensibly affected with a treatment, which expresses not only neglect, but contempt and hatred.

A worthy successor to Mr. Biddle, in the like sufferings, and for the same cause, the excellent Mr. Emlyn, felt the full force of this trial. "During this more than two whole years imprisonment," says he, "my former acquaintance (how intimate soever before) were altogether estranged from me, and all offices of civility in a manner ceased; especially among them of superior rank, though a few of the plainer tradesmen of my own people were more compassionate and kind. O! my God, what a change hast thou made in my outward condition! I had a tolerable esteem, and a multitude of friends, but am now become their scorn and bye-word, and my acquaintance and friends stand afar off*."

Thus bigotry cancels the bonds of life, and heretical pravity is looked on as more criminal

* Emlyn's Works, vol. 1. p. 36. 4th ed. 1746. Memoirs of his life, p. 38.

than the most heinous acts of immorality. A robber and a murderer is treated according to the rights of humanity, and is indulged with the visit of sympathy and friendship, which is denied to the man who deviates from the prevailing faith, though his character in every other respect is blameless and excellent; denied by those, who profess a religion which inculcates *visiting the prisoner*, as an expression of respect, of attachment, and gratitude, to its great author. But so it pleaseth providence, that the cup of which the sufferer for righteousness sake partaketh, should be mingled with every bitter ingredient, to try his faith, to exalt his virtue, and to shew the power of truth, surmounting, in the end, every evil and difficulty.

In the experience of Mr. Biddle, poverty was added to imprisonment and the neglect of mankind. Notwithstanding the recruit which his fortune had received from the legacy just mentioned, his substance, in the course of seven years confinement, was all spent, and he was reduced to such indigence, that, unable to pay for the ordinary repast of the table, he was glad, says his biographer, "of the cheaper support of drinking, a draught of milk from the cow, morning and evening."

When he was reduced to this situation, and had been so long precluded from all the means of

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support,

support, which the benevolence of others, or his own industry, might supply, divine providence did not leave him to perish through want, but opened for him an unexpected resource. Mr. Roger Daniel, a printer, of London, formed at that time the design of publishing a new and most accurate edition of the greek version of the old Testament, called the Septuagint. At the recommendation of a learned man, he employed Mr. Biddle to correct the impression, knowing full well, says Mr. Wood, that Biddle was an exact grecian, and had time enough to follow it. This was an employment not only seasonable, but most acceptable to Mr. Biddle, "whose delight," observes the writer of his life, "was in the law of God. This, and another employment of a more private nature, did, for some time, furnish him with a comfortable subsistence*."

In the year 1651, such public measures were taken, as, by their operation, were favourable to our virtuous sufferer; for the parliament published an act of indemnity for all crimes; with a few exceptions, which did not reach the case of those who were confined for advancing and disseminating what were deemed heretical opinions. This act restored, among others, Mr. Biddle to full liberty.

* Wood's Athenæ Oxonienses. Art. Biddle.

In consequence of the pieces he had published, and of the severe proceedings against him, it appears, that an attention to the general question was awakened; and some had been made converts to his principles, particularly in London. The liberty which he now obtained, was improved by his meeting, on every Lord's day, with those friends he had gained in the city, for the purpose of expounding the scriptures, and discoursing thereon.

The principle, on which Mr. Biddle and his adherents first formed themselves into a distinct and separate society was, that the *unity of God is an unity of person as well as nature*; that the holy spirit is indeed a person, but not God. The object of their religious association was to exert their endeavours, that the honour of almighty God should not be transferred to another. For, as Mr. Biddle urges, in a piece before quoted, "God is jealous of his honour, and will not give it to another; we, therefore, as beloved children, should imitate our heavenly Father herein, and not, upon any pretence whatsoever, depart from his express command, and give the worship of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth to him whom the scripture nowhere affirmeth to be God."

Mr. Biddle's society, emancipated from the restraints of an establishment, and assembling toge-

ther, not only for the purpose of divine worship, but for freely investigating theological questions, adopted some other discriminating notions. Such as these; "that the fathers under the old covenant had only temporal promises; that saving faith consisted in universal obedience performed to the commands of God and Christ; that Christ rose again only by the power of his Father, not his own; that *justifying faith* is not the pure gift of God, but may be acquired by men's natural abilities; that faith cannot believe any thing contrary to, or above reason; that there is no *original sin*; that Christ hath not the same body now in glory, in which he suffered and rose again; that the saints shall not have the same body in heaven which they had on earth; that Christ was not *lord* or *king* before his resurrection, or *priest* before his ascension; that the saints shall not, before the day of judgment, enjoy the bliss of heaven; that God doth not certainly know future contingencies; that there is not any authority of fathers or general councils in determining matters of faith; that Christ before his death had not any dominion over the angels; and that Christ, by dying, made no satisfaction for us *."

* See the Preface to Sir Peter Pett's *Happy future state of England*; as quoted by Mosheim's translator. Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical history*, vol. v. p. 36. note (rr) of the 2d edition in 1767.

The members of this society were called from Mr. Biddle, their head and pastor, "bidellians;" and from their agreement in opinion, concerning the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, with the followers of Socinus, they were denominated "socinians." "They followed indeed, at first, Mr. Biddle (as he espoused the tenets of Socinus) but so, that as soon as there appeared better light, (to use a scripture phrase) *they rejoiced in it.*" The name which most properly characterised their leading sentiment and detachment from an implicit adherence to any teacher, was that of "unitarians."

This was the rise of the *english unitarians*, to whose honour it was said, that "besides an acuteness and dexterity of thought, they were excellently learned, especially in sacred criticism." But "that which most commended them, was the freedom and sincerity, which they all along practised, in judging of the controverted articles of religion."

It is justice to the worthy persons themselves, and useful to posterity and the cause of truth, to perpetuate, if possible, the names of those who have been its patrons and advocates, or sufferers for it; and who, by their exertions, though not by their pen, have contributed to the spread of religious knowledge and free inquiry. We regret

it, that of those who were Mr. Biddle's friends, and members of the church which he raised, only two names have been preserved to us; those of Mr. Nathaniel Stuckey and Mr. Thomas Firmin.

The first was a young gentleman, eminent for his distinguished parts and early piety. He was born in 1649. At the age of fifteen he published a latin translation of Mr. Biddle's scripture catechism, for the use of foreigners; and in the next year 1665, he printed a latin version of Mr. Biddle's *Brief catechism for children*; to which he annexed an oration of his own, in the same language, on the sufferings and death of Christ*. This young man died at the age of seventeen†.

* To this edition of Mr. Biddle's catechetical pieces was also subjoined, a letter addressed to him by Jeremiah Felbinger, a zealous unitarian, who was born in Silesia, but having been obliged often to change his residence on account of his sentiments, died in Amsterdam, where he supported himself by the care of a school, and correcting the press. The purport of the letter just mentioned, was to express his joy in the acquisition of such a man to the party of the antitrinitarians; and to convey his earnest wishes, supported by various arguments, that he would go on to exert himself in the same cause, and would disseminate the sentiments he adopted, not only in England, but in the new world. Vide Fr. Sam. Beck *Historia antitrinitariorum*, vol. 2. 8vo. 1776. Art. Felbingerius.

† Sandii *Bibliotheca antitrinitariorum*. Art. Bidellius & Felbingerius.

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But the greatest honour and support were derived to Mr. Biddle and his cause from the friendship and exertions of Mr. Thomas Firmin, the friend and intimate of the doctors Outram, Whichcote and Worthington, and of the bishops Wilkins, Tillotson and Fowler; a man of eminent piety and superior virtue; who, for active and generous benevolence, has had few equals in any age. Bishop Burnet says of him, that "he was in great esteem for promoting many charitable designs, for looking after the poor of the city, and setting them to work: for raising great sums for schools and hospitals, and indeed for charities of all sorts, private and public. He had such credit with the richest citizens, that he had the command of great wealth as often as there was occasion for it*." His time was devoted to benevolent exertions; his fortune was laid out in liberal munificent deeds. The hospitals of St. Thomas and of Christ particularly felt the influence, and continue to enjoy the good effects, of his generosity and activity. In the cloister of the latter, a marble records and perpetuates the praises of his wonderful zeal and charity†.

* Bishop Burnett's History of his own times, v. 3. octavo, p. 292.

† For a full account of his most useful and generous deeds, see his life written by "one of his most intimate acquaintance," and more lately by Mr. Cornish.

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Mr. Firmin, besides being the personal friend of Mr. Biddle, continued, after his decease, and until after the revolution, with much vigour and assiduity, to promote the reception of his opinions. He encouraged many publications in defence of the unity of God, which he dispersed over the nation, distributing them freely to all who would accept of them. He had a particular concern in the publication of several volumes of unitarian tracts in quarto, which issued forth from the press about the time of the revolution.

Mr. Firmin was a very young man when Mr. Biddle's society was first formed; and it does not appear that it subsisted after the death of its founder, who did not attempt to bring his friends into such close bonds of union, as would preserve them a distinct community after his removal. The force of the testimony, which was borne to the doctrine of the divine unity by the writings of the unitarians, could not but be greatly diminished by the dissolution of Mr. Biddle's society. It is to be lamented, that Mr. Firmin, in particular, did not exert himself to keep together this body of unitarians, or that, if, as one would hope, he did take some steps with this design, they were not successful.

SECTION VIII.

*Mr. Biddle's Dispute with Dr. Gunning, and
Publication of his Catechism.*

WHILE Mr. Biddle and his friends enjoyed the liberty of holding religious assemblies, Dr. Gunning, afterwards regius professor of divinity at Cambridge, and bishop of Ely, who had visited Mr. Biddle in prison, and was eminent as a learned man, and as a ready acute disputant, came on a lord's day, in the year 1654, to their meeting, accompanied with some learned friends. His conduct soon explained his intentions and views, that they were, not to be an hearer of Mr. Biddle, and a witness of the order of his worship, but publicly and before his own adherents, to confound and confute him. For he commenced a disputation with him, on the first time, concerning the deity of the holy spirit; and then, on the next lord's day, concerning the supreme deity of Christ. The disputation was carried on in the syllogistic mode, and they took their turns of responding and opposing.

Mr. Biddle was evidently taken at a great disadvantage, as he was suddenly surprised into a debate, without any preparation for it. But this circum-

circumstance contributed to display both his furniture and abilities, and to shew how much he had studied the questions, and was master of the argument. For his biographer informs us, that Mr. Biddle acquitted himself with so much learning, judgment, and knowledge in the sense of the holy scriptures, that instead of losing, he gained much credit both to himself and his cause, as even some of the gentlemen of Dr. Gunning's party had the ingenuity to acknowledge *."

But the doctor, unwilling to sit down as foiled, or presuming on his own superiority in another question, surprised Mr. Biddle a third time, and finding him in the discussion of the argument against the satisfaction of punitive justice by the death of Christ, he defended that sentiment with great vigour. But on this, as on the former occasions, he met with a skilful and dexterous opponent; which he had the generosity afterwards to confess.

This method of attack, by intruding unawares, upon a religious society, and interrupting their worship, or by discussing controverted points in a public disputation, hath, very properly, been laid aside, and given way, in our more liberal age, to the use of the pen. There was a rudeness and a

* Unitarian tracts. Biddle's life, p. 6, 7.

violence in it, from which modern politeness is justly averse; and it favoured more of the spirit of contention, and an eagerness for victory, than of the love of truth. Yet public disputation was a mode of opposing supposed error, generally practised through Europe, from the time of the reformation till the close of the last century. Whatever advantage might arise from such public discussion of theological questions, by awakening the attention of men, and exciting them to think and inquire on subjects, to which perhaps they would not, otherwise, have turned their thoughts: yet they were productive of much evil, by inflaming the spirits of men. They thus tended to beget in some a dislike, and in others a contempt of religious debate; while the prevailing party took occasion to triumph with all the insolence of power.

But to return—this year of Mr. Biddle's life was distinguished more by the publication of two *catechetical* pieces, than by his public disputations with Dr. Gunning. They were entitled, “A
 “ Two-fold catechism; the one simply called *A*
 “ *Scripture catechism*; the other *A Brief scrip-*
 “ *ture catechism* for children; wherein the chiefest
 “ points of the christian religion, being question-
 “ wise proposed, resolve themselves by pertinent
 “ answers taken word for word out of the scrip-
 “ ture, without either consequences or comments.

“ Composed

“ Composed for their sakes that would fain be
 “ *mere christians*, and not of this or that sect, in-
 “ asmuch as all the sects of christians, by what
 “ names soever distinguished, have more or less
 “ departed from the simplicity and truth of the
 “ scripture.” The discriminating title of the
 other runs, *A Brief scripture catechism for chil-*
dren; wherein, notwithstanding the brevity there-
 of, all things necessary unto life and godliness are
 contained. By John Biddle, master of arts, of
 the university of Oxford.

In the preface to the first of these, Mr. Biddle
 complains, that all catechisms were generally so fil-
 led with the suppositions and traditions of men;
 that “ the least part of them was derived from the
 word of God.” For, says he, “ when councils,
 convocations, and assemblies of divines, justling
 the sacred writers out of their place in the church,
 had once framed articles and confessions of faith
 according to their own fancies and interests, and
 the civil magistrate had by his authority ratified the
 same, all catechisms were afterwards fitted to those
 articles and confessions, and the scripture either
 wholly omitted, or brought in, only for a shew, not
 one quotation amongst many being a whit to the
 purpose, as will appear to any man of judgment,
 who taking into his hands the said catechisms,
 shall examine the texts alledged in them; for if he
 do

do this diligently and impartially, he will find the scripture and those catechisms to be "at so wide a distance from one another, that he will begin to question, whether the catechists gave any heed at all to what they wrote, and did not only themselves refuse to make use of their reason, but presume that their readers also would do the same."

To prevent the evils of this method, Mr. Biddle professes, that, according to the understanding he had obtained by continual meditation on the word of God, he had compiled his scripture catechism; in which he himself asserted nothing, but only introduced the scripture faithfully uttering its own assertions, which all christians confess to be of undoubted truth.

Mr. Biddle, aware that his catechism would exhibit sentiments contrary to the current opinion of the age, cautions his reader against taking offence at them. "Take heed that thou fall not foul upon them, for thou canst not do so, without falling upon the holy scripture itself, inasmuch as all the answers throughout the whole catechism are faithfully transcribed out of it, and rightly applied to the questions, as thou thyself mayest perceive, if thou shalt make a diligent inspection into the several texts, with all their circumstances."

He was apprehensive that objection would

be made to the design for which some texts were cited, viz. that they ought to be understood figuratively; he protests therefore against putting figurative interpretations on the scripture, without express warrant of the scripture itself, as a method of interpretation subject to no certain rule, and which might be applied to the support of any absurdity. "Certainly, might we of our own heads, argues he, figuratively interpret the scripture; when the letter is neither repugnant to our senses, nor to the scope of respective texts, nor to a greater number of plain texts to the contrary, (for in such cases we must of necessity admit figures in the sacred volume, as well as we do in profane ones, otherwise both they and it will clash either with themselves, or with our senses, which the scripture itself intimates to be of infallible certainty, see 1 John 1, 2, 3.) might we, I say, at our pleasure, impose our figures and allegories on the plain words of God, the scripture would in very deed be, what some blasphemously assert it, *a nose of wax*.

His reflexions on the confusion of language introduced into the christian religion, by the invention of intricate and unscriptural terms and phrases, which are not understood, either by the people, or by those that invented them, deserve attention. "Wherefore, says he, there is no possibility to reduce the christian religion to its primitive

tive integrity, (a thing he observes, never sincerely attempted, even in the reformed churches, since men have, by severe penalties, been hindered from proceeding further than did Luther or Calvin) but by cashiering those many intricate terms, and devised forms of speaking, imposed on our religion, and by wholly betaking ourselves to the plainness of the scripture. For I have long since observed, (and find my observation to be true and certain) that when, to express matters of religion, men make use of words and phrases unheard of in the scripture, they slyly under them couch false doctrines, and obtrude them on us; for without question the doctrines of the scripture can be so aptly explained in no language, as that of scripture itself."

After a full enumeration of various terms, introduced into theology, Mr. Biddle remarks: "After Constantine the Great, together with the council of Nice, had once deviated from the language of the scripture in the business touching the son of God, calling him co-essential with the Father; this opened a gap for others afterwards, under a pretence of guarding the truth from heretics, to devise new terms at pleasure, which did by degrees so vitiate the chastity and simplicity of our faith delivered in the scripture, that there hardly remained so much as one point thereof sound and entire." So that as it was wont to be disputed in

the schools, whether the old ship of Theseus (which had in a manner been wholly altered at sundry times, by the accession of new pieces of timber upon the decay of the old) were the same ship it had been at first, and not rather another by degrees substituted in the stead thereof. In like manner, there was so much of the primitive truth worn away by the corruption, that did by little and little overspread the generality of christians, and so many errors instead thereof tacked to our religion at several times, that one might justly question, whether it were the same religion with that which Christ and his apostles taught, and not another since devised by men, and put in the room thereof.

“But thanks be to God, through our lord Jesus Christ, who, amidst the universal corruption of our religion, hath preserved his written word entire, (for had men corrupted it, they would have made it speak more favourably in behalf of their lusts and worldly interests, than it doth) which word, if we with diligence and sincerity pry into, resolving to embrace the doctrine that is there plainly delivered, though all the world should set itself against us for so doing, we shall easily discern the truth, and so be able to reduce our religion to its first principles. For thus much I perceive by my own experience,

nience, who being otherwise of no great abilities, yet setting myself with the aforeſaid reſolution, for ſundry years together, upon an impartial ſearch of the ſcripture, have not only detected many errors, but preſented the readers with a body of religion, exactly tranſcribed out of the word of God; which body, whoſoever ſhall well ruminare and digeſt in his mind, may, by the ſame method wherein I have gone before him, make a further inquiry into the oracles of God, and draw forth whatſoever yet lies hid, and being brought to light, will tend to the accompliſhment of godlineſs amongſt us, for at this only all the ſcripture aimeth: I ſay the ſcripture, which all men, who have thoroughly ſtudyed the ſame, muſt of neceſſity be enamoured with, as breathing out the mere wiſdom of God, and being the exacteſt rule of a holy life (which all religions whatſoever confeſs, to be the way unto happineſs), that can be imagined, and whoſe divinity will never, even to the world's end, be queſtioned by any but ſuch, as are unwilling to deny their worldly luſts, and obey the pure and perfect precepts. Which obedience, whoſoever ſhall perform, he ſhall not only in the life to come, but even in this life, be equal to the angels."

Mr. Biddle's *ſcripture catechiſm*, which is introduced by theſe reflexions, is divided into twenty

four chapters; comprising a system of speculative and practical theology. The subjects are, of the holy scripture, or word of God; of God; of the creation; of Christ Jesus; of the holy ghost; of salvation by Christ; of Christ's mediation; of Christ's prophetic office; of remission of sins by Christ; of Christ's kingly office; of Christ's priestly office; of Christ's death; of the universality of God's love; of Christ's resurrection; of justification and faith; of keeping the commandments, and having an eye to the reward; of perfection in virtue and godliness to be attained, and of departing from righteousness and faith; of the duty of subjects and magistrates; wives and husbands; children and parents, servants and masters; of the behaviour of men and women in general, and in special, of aged men, aged women, young women and young men; of prayer; of the church; of the government and discipline of the church; of baptism; of the lord's supper; of the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment; and what shall be the final condition of the righteous and the wicked thereupon.

This piece, though drawn up purely in the words of scripture, was formed with a pointed reference to the opinions, which he conceived had no foundation in the scriptures; and many of his quotations were so constructed as to introduce the

texts

texts which appeared, explicitly and plainly, to stand in contrast with those sentiments. For instance,

In the chapter on God, there is this general question concerning the love of the divine Being: Could we love him with *all the heart*, if he were *three*? Or is his *Oneness* the cause hinted by Moses, why we should love him thus? How sound the words according to the truth of the hebrew text? See Amisworth's translation.

Answer.—“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE.” Deut. vi. 4.

In the chapter on the kingly office of Christ, there is another example of this pointed reference, viz. “Ought men to honour the son as they honour the Father, because he hath the *same essence* with the Father, or because he hath the *same* judiciary power?” What is the decision of the son himself concerning this point? Answer. “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the son; that all men should honour the son, even as they honour the Father.” John v. 22, 23. 2. Did the Father give judiciary power to the son, because he had in him the *divine nature personally united to the human*, or because he was the *son of man*? What is the decision of the son concerning this point also? Answer. He hath given him au-
thority

thority to execute judgement, because *he is the son of man*."

On the head of justification we meet also with some questions, close and pointed, after the same manner. E. g. 2. In the justification of a believer, is the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, or his own faith for righteousness? Ans. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, *his faith is counted for righteousness*." 2. Doth not God justify men, because of the full price that *Christ* paid to him in their stead, so that he abated nothing of his right, in that one drop of *Christ's* blood is sufficient to satisfy for a thousand worlds? If not, how are they saved? Ans. "Being justified **FREELY** by his grace, through the redemption, that is in *Christ Jesus*; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the *forgiveness of sin*, according to the *riches of his grace*, Rom. iii. 24. Eph. i. 7.

Should it be thought that this mode of introducing and refuting the sentiments of others, has too much the air of controversy, perfectly to suit the design of a catechism professedly scriptural; it must be allowed to be a pertinent and forcible way of bringing into view texts that seemed to be overlooked; and of shewing that the language of the other party was totally unscriptural, and their

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conclusions from some particular passages absolutely repugnant to the plain declarations of other texts.

The catechism which we have reviewed, was too prolix for the attention and memory of children; of this Mr. Biddle appears to have been fully sensible; for, as it has been noticed, he connected with it another catechetical composition, called, "A brief catechism for children;" whether, he says in the preface, "in years or understanding; that they might receive true and solid information concerning the chief articles of the christian faith." "Yea," he adds, "perhaps it may (as well as the larger catechism going before) give further light and instruction even to them, who seem to have attained a full stature in the knowledge of the gospel. For, though all the things, whether of belief or practice, that are either necessary or very profitable to the attainment of eternal life, be plainly delivered in the scripture, yet, considering in what principles christians are generally educated, it would perhaps have been impossible for them, having the eyes of their understanding so veiled with prejudicate opinions, to see what is clearly held forth in the scripture, and accordingly witho easifatched rom bto h hene by megl who have long since discarded prejudices, and am,

(through

(through the special favour of Jesus Christ towards me) addicted to none of those many factions in religion, whereinto the christian world hath, to its infinite hurt, been divided, but rejoice to be a *mere christian*, admitting (as I have elsewhere declared) no other rule of faith than the holy scripture, (which all christians, though otherwise at infinite variance amongst themselves in their opinions about religion, unanimously acknowledge to be the word of God,) nor any other interpreter, if a doubt arise about the meaning of the scripture, than reason; which all sober men confess to be the only principle that God hath implanted in us to judge between right and wrong, good and bad, and whereby we excel all other living creatures whatsoever."

"The lord Jesus grant, that this and the foregoing larger catechism may, by the readers, be perused as profitably, as I have willingly to that end communicated the same unto them."

The *Brief catechism* is divided into ten chapters; treating, in succession, of the scripture, or word of God; of God; of Jesus Christ; of the holy spirit and of the trinity; of the death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ; of mortification and holiness; of the commandments, and so of love to God and men; of faith; of the church;

church; of the resurrection of the dead; and of the last judgment.

These catechisms alarmed the advocates for the orthodox faith; and the authority of the scripture language and declarations, under which the writers took shelter, was insufficient to protect him from a prosecution, and his book from an ignominious censure.

The parliament condemned, in particular, these propositions: (1.) "That God is confined to a certain place." (2.) That he has a bodily shape. (3.) That he has passions. (4.) That he is neither omnipotent nor unchangeable. (5.) That we are not to believe three persons in the God-head. (6.) That Jesus Christ has not the nature of God, but only a divine lordship. (7.) That he was not a priest while upon earth, nor did reconcile men to God. And (8.) That there is no deity in the holy ghost*.

Considering the very limited state of free inquiry, at that time, it is rather surprising that a ninth proposition, or ground of charge, against Mr. Biddle had not been added; viz. the future annihilation of the wicked, or that they would not, as the godly and faithful, "live for ever," but be "destroyed, corrupted, burnt up, devoured, slain, pass-

* Neal's History of the puritans, v. iv. p. 185. 8vo.

away, and perish." For he produced many texts to exhibit this view of future punishments.

The propositions, which they did deduce from these catechetical pieces, were deemed sufficient grounds for proceeding, with severity, against Mr. Biddle. A learned modern writer, who does not adopt the author's peculiar sentiments, has observed of "the scripture catechism," that it discovers an enlargement of mind, a liberality of sentiment, and a sincerity, in freely publishing what he apprehended to be truth, which do honour to his memory*." But the age in which it was published, as we have seen, was by no means disposed to treat those compositions or writers, that discarded or opposed the prevailing faith, with candour or equity. Of which Mr. Biddle, on this occasion, had new experience.

He was brought to the bar of the house of commons, which the protector Cromwell had convened; and was examined whether he was the author of that *two-fold scripture catechism*, wherein all the questions are answered in the words of scripture at large. Mr. Biddle, to these interrogatories, wisely made a reply, which at once conveyed an appeal to the principles of equity, and expressed his just expectations from the genius of

* Harwood, on the socinian scheme, p. 21.

the english constitution. For he answered by asking, "Whether it seemed reasonable that one brought before a judgment-seat, as a criminal, should accuse himself?" The reason, which this answer carried in it, was not admitted as a bar to the proceedings against him; but on the 3d of December he was committed close prisoner to the gate-house, and forbidden the use of pen, ink, and paper, and denied the access of any visitant.

In this case, nothing less than a capital judgment was to be expected; a bill was accordingly brought in for punishing him. In this situation Mr. Biddle preserved a composed and cheerful mind, and maintained his hope of an happy event from the providence of God, in whose cause he suffered. His hope did not fail him; for the protector, induced by reasons drawn from his own interest, dissolved the parliament; and the prisoner, after ten months imprisonment, obtained his liberty, May 28, by due course of law.

The resentment of government pursued the book as well as the author; for an order was issued out, that the catechism should be burnt by the hands of the common hangman; which was accordingly done on the 14th of December. This

* Unitarian tracts, vol. i. 4to. The life of Biddle, p. 72 and British biography, vol. vi. 8vo. p. 86.

mode of casting an odium upon particular writings, hath been practised by all governments, and in all ages*. The disgrace ultimately falls on those who adopt this measure: for it indicates the weakness of their cause, or the indolence of its partisans. They either have not the ability, or will not be at the pains, to discuss and refute the opinions they would suppress. It is a method of dismissing, as much within the power of the ignorant, as the learned; and of the fool, as of the wise man. And, after all, though a book may be burned, an impression cannot be annihilated in one fire. Copies will be secretly preserved and read; and will, in a future unprejudiced age, bring forward the question, if it hath been judiciously stated, and closely argued, to disgrace the memory of those who would have stifled inquiry.

It is however but justice to the times of which we write, to say, that while the ruling powers prosecuted and imprisoned Mr. Biddle, and burnt his catechisms, some pursued a more fair and rational mode of exposing the supposed weakness of his arguments, and investigating the truth of his opinions. Mr. Nicholas Estwick, of Wakton, in Northamptonshire, and some time fellow of

* Cicero de naturâ deorum, curâ Davissii, l. i. c. 23. Minutius Felix, curâ Davissii, cap. 8. Taciti Annales, l. iv. cap. 35.

Christ's college, in Cambridge, published a professed Examination and confutation of Mr. Biddle's confession of faith concerning the holy trinity. And, to the honour of the leading men in the state, it should be mentioned, that they availed themselves of the learning and abilities of the celebrated Dr. Owen to discuss, from the press, the positions of Mr. Biddle's catechisms. For at the command of the right honourable the council of state, he drew up and published his *VINDICIÆ EVANGELICÆ*; or the mystery of the gospel vindicated; and socinianism examined, in the consideration and confutation of a catechism, called a *scripture catechism*, written by J. Biddle, A. M. Mr. Neal has called this work a learned and elaborate treatise. The celebrity of Mr. Biddle's writings was not confined to England, they were attended to abroad, and several foreigners published refutations of his sentiments*.

Another effect of Mr. Biddle's catechetical publication was, that to guard the minds of people, especially of the rising generation, from what were deemed heretical sentiments, the provincial assembly at London published *An exhortation to catechising*, with directions for the more regular con-

* Bock *Historia antitrinitariorum*, tom. i. par. 1. p. 54.

ducting of it. These instructions were sent to the several classes of London, and, after their example, the associated ministers in the several counties of England published the like exhortation to their brethren*.

This measure originated from zeal for a particular system, and certainly tended to fix in young minds strong prejudices in its favour; yet it was worthy of true piety and zeal, and may be supposed to have greatly contributed to prevent a pernicious and total ignorance of all religious principles.

SECTION IX.

A new prosecution commenced against Mr. Biddle.

It may be thought, that after having experienced such evils and sufferings for the open avowal and defence of his religious opinions, Mr. Biddle should have withdrawn from public notice, and have silently enjoyed his own view of things in private. The love of ease and safety would certainly have dictated this conduct, and worldly prudence would

* Neal's History of the puritans, vol. iv. p. 135 and 136. 8vo.

have approved it. But Mr. Biddle seems to have entertained other sentiments, and to have thought that personal comfort and safety ought to be sacrificed to truth, and our duty to God. Socrates, the grecian sage, thought so before him*. When he was pleading before his judges: "Perhaps," says he, "some one will ask, Why can you not, Socrates, withdraw, and, banishing yourself from us, spend your life in silent and retired leisure?" It would be a most difficult matter to convince you that I cannot do this. Should I urge, that this would be to disobey God, and that therefore I cannot be silent, you would discredit me, as a dissembler. Were I to alledge, that to hold daily conversations on virtue and other topics, which you have heard that I canvas and investigate with others, is the greatest human felicity; for a life spent without inquiry is not

* ἴσως οὖν ἂν τις εἴποι, Σίγῃν τε καὶ ψυχὴν ἀγῶν, ὡς Σωκράτης, οὐχ οἷος τ' εἶναι ἡμῖν ἐξέλθων ζῆν; Τοῦτε δὲ ἐστὶ πάλιν χαλεπώτατον πείσαι τινας ὑμῶν. εἰναι γὰρ λέγω, ὅτι τῷ θεῷ ἀπειθεῖν τοῦτ' ἐστὶ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἀδύνατον ψυχὴν ἀγῶν, οὐ πείσεσθε μοι, ὡς ἐπιδεικνύμενοι· εἰναι τ' αὖθις λέγω, ὅτι καὶ τυγχάνει μεγίστον ἀγαθὸν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοὶ ἠκούετε διαλεγόμενοι, καὶ ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντες (οὐδὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος, οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπου) ταῦτα δέ τι πλεον πείσεσθε μοι λεγόντι. τα δὲ ἔχει μὲν οὐκ, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, ὦ ἄνδρες, πείθειν δὲ οὐ ραδίαι. Platonis Dialog. V. curâ Forster, p. 111, 112, &c Opera Platonis, quoted by Dr. Doddridge. Family Expofitor, vol. iii. on Acts iv. 19. note (n).

" a life for man : you would be as far from be-
 " lieving me. But things are as I represent them,
 " though it is not easy to persuade you of it.
 " If ye would dismiss me and spare my life, on
 " condition that I should leave off to teach my
 " fellow-citizens, I would rather die a thousand
 " times than accept the proposal."

Mr. Biddle's conduct had a superior sanction in
 that of the apostles; who, when commanded by
 the jewish sanhedrim, not to speak at all, nor teach
 in the name of Jesus, answered, " Whether it be
 " right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you
 " more than unto God, judge ye." Acts iv. 19.
 A christian has more powerful reasons for a strict,
 open, and firm attachment to truth, than has an
 heathen philosopher; for he has the word of God
 to direct his inquiries, and authorise his conduct,
 and he has the hope of immortality to support
 and animate his steady zeal.

Mr. Biddle, influenced by these considerations,
 so far from withdrawing from the scene of exer-
 tion and suffering, betook himself to his former
 exercises for propagating, what appeared to his
 mind, divine truth, as closely connected with the
 honour of almighty God. Scarcely, therefore,
 had a year expired, after he was released from the
 prosecution on account of his *Scripture catechism*,
 than a new danger, not less formidable, overtook
 him.

Notwith-

Notwithstanding the odium, under which his sentiments laid, and the offence they gave to the governing power, they began to be embraced by a considerable part of a baptist congregation under the pastoral care of Mr. Griffin; who took alarm at this infection, and, to stop its spread, challenged Mr. Biddle to a public disputation in his meeting-house at St. Paul's. Mr. Neal has, to whatever cause it was owing, given a representation of this matter not quite so honourable to Mr. Biddle, as the truth of the fact requires; for he says, that Mr. Biddle, being of a restless spirit, challenged Mr. Griffin; thus not only mistating the proceedings, as originating from Mr. Biddle, but uncandidly ascribing them to a wrong cause. It appears from Mr. Biddle's biographer, that he not only was not first in this business, but waved the challenge, and declined the disputation for some time. At length he met Mr. Griffin, amidst a numerous auditory, among whom were many of his bitter and fiery adversaries, especially some booksellers, notoriously known for their false zeal and former opposition to Christian liberty, under the name of *beacon friers* *.

* Neal's History of the puritans, vol. iv. p. 137. 8vo. Their names were Thomas Underhill, Luke Fawn, and Nathaniel Webb. See Crosby's History of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 209.

To introduce the debate, Mr. Griffin asked, "If any man there did deny, that *Christ* was God most high?" The event gave too much reason to apprehend, that the matter was thus opened, insidiously to draw from Mr. Biddle's own mouth, grounds of accusation. Mr. Biddle, with sincerity and firmness, replied, "I do deny it." Mr. Griffin, on this, it should seem, entered into a proof of the affirmative; but, in the judgment of judicious hearers, was not able to support his cause against Mr. Biddle; and the disputation was adjourned to another day, when Mr. Biddle, it was agreed, should take his turn of establishing the negative side of the question between them.

Before that day came, other measures of confutation, besides fair discussion and argument, were adopted. The adversaries of Mr. Biddle laid hold of the open and generous profession he had made of his sentiments: information was lodged against him. He was apprehended and committed to the compter, July 3, 1655; from thence he was removed to Newgate, and was at the next sessions called to trial for his life, on the ordinance against blasphemy and heresy, which we have before mentioned. The iniquity of this proceeding was aggravated by its being founded on an act, which had never properly received the force of a law, and had, for several years, lain obsolete.

But

But the inveterate zeal of persecutors admits no measures of kindness or equity. The manner of conducting this prosecution against Mr. Biddle, as well as the grounds on which it was commenced, afforded a proof of this. For when he prayed, that counsel might be allowed him to plead the illegality of the indictment, it was denied him by the judges, and the sentence of a mute threatened. Upon this he gave into court his exceptions engrossed on parchment, and, with much struggling, had counsel allowed him; but the trial was deferred to the next day.

In this emergency, the principles and policy of Oliver Cromwell operated in favour of Mr. Biddle. The protector was an enemy to persecution; and among the capital articles, on which his government was formed, were these liberal ones, viz. "That such as profess faith in God, by Jesus Christ, (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in the profession of the faith, and exercise of their religion; and that all laws, statutes, and ordinances, &c. to the contrary of the aforesaid liberty, shall be esteemed null and void. It was also his art, by dexterous management, to keep the opposite parties, then in the nation, in a kind of equipoise, which he found necessary for his
own

own security. He saw it was not for the interest of his government to have Mr. Biddle either condemned or absolved. He therefore took him out of the hands of the law, and detained him in prison. His release would have offended the presbyterians and all the enemies to religious liberty, of whom there appeared a great number at his trial. On the contrary, the proceedings against Mr. Biddle were opposed by the friends of liberty; they were censured and reprobated by different publications from the press. And while petitions were, by one party presented against him, the other did not lie dormant, but solicited his discharge, and urged their suit by pointed remonstrances against that ordinance, as threatening all their liberties, and infringing the fundamental articles of the protector's government. Many congregations of baptists appeared on this occasion, as friends to Mr. Biddle, and advocates for the rights of conscience. At length Cromwell, wearied with petitions, for and against, to terminate the affair, and, in some degree meet the wishes of each party, banished Mr. Biddle to the isle of Scilly, whither he was sent October 5, 1655.*

* Short account of the life of John Biddle, p. 7, 8. and Crosby's history of the english baptists, vol. 1. p. 206. 215.

Disagreeable and afflictive, as must be this state of exile, it was rather a shelter from the vindictive spirit of his enemies, and was a means of preventing another parliament, under the protector, from decreeing any thing more rigid against him, as he was absent and out of their way. The inconveniences and wants of his situation were also relieved by the kindness of the protector himself; who, after some time, allowed him in his exile an hundred crowns per annum for his subsistence; which, as an act of pure generosity, shewn to a persecuted man, whose tenets could not be agreeable to Cromwell, reflects honour on his name.

The evils of Mr. Biddle's banishment were, in other respects, alleviated; especially by the state of his mind, and the employment of his thoughts. "Here, his biographer informs us, he enjoyed much divine comfort from the heavenly contemplations, for which his retirement gave him opportunity. Here he had sweet communion with the Father, and his son Jesus Christ, and attained, in many particulars, a clearer understanding of the divine oracles. Here, whilst he was more abundantly confirmed in the doctrines of his confession of faith, &c. yet he seems, notwithstanding, to have become more doubtful about some other points which he formerly held; as appears from his *Essay to explaining the revelation*, which he wrote

wrote after his return thence; which shews that he still maintained a free and unprejudiced mind*.

Though Mr. Biddle's banishment lasted three years, his friends were not regardless of his interest and liberty; but were active in their endeavours to procure his release. He himself wrote letters, both to the protector and to Mr. Calamy, an eminent presbyterian minister, to reason them into compassion, but without immediate success. It may, perhaps, be offered in extenuation of Mr. Calamy's apparent neglect of Mr. Biddle's applications, that in Oliver's time he kept himself as private as he could. At length, the solicitations of friends, favoured by the operation of other occurrences, prevailed, and the protector permitted a writ of habeas corpus to be granted out of the upper-bench court, whereby Mr. Biddle was brought back, and by that court set at liberty, as finding no legal cause of detaining him.

A short account, &c. p. 8. PALMER'S Nonconformist's memorial, vol. 1. p. 74.

SECTION X.

His renewal of his public Ministrations—his last imprisonment—and Death.

THE reflexions, with which we opened the preceding chapter, are equally pertinent to the conduct of Mr. Biddle, which we are to review in this. He still preserved the firmness of his mind. He still felt the ardor of zeal. Notwithstanding the dangers, sufferings, and persecutions, which he had sustained, he was not terrified from what he counted his duty to Christ, in propagating the true knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he had sent. Upon his return to London, he resumed his religious exercises among his friends, and acted as pastor to a congregation in the city, formed on the principles of the independents*.

The national affairs soon took a turn unfavourable to Mr. Biddle's prosecution of his delightful work. For, about five months after, the protector died, and Richard succeeding, called a parliament, which, it was supposed, would be

* British biography, 8vo. vol. vi. p. 87.

particularly inimical to him. At the importunity of a noble friend, he reluctantly retired into the country, during their session. On the dissolution of that parliament, he returned to his former station.

This period of tranquility, and of his ministerial services, was but of short duration. The enjoyment of religious liberty was, in those times, fluctuating and precarious, dependent upon the state of political affairs, and changing with the national revolutions. Of this Mr. Biddle had repeated experience. And though the reign of his enemies, the presbyterians, was now drawing to its close, its termination afforded him no security; but, by the change of government, he was involved in new difficulties and dangers; and became a sufferer in common with those, from whose hands he had a little before suffered. With the settlement of CHARLES II. on the throne of his ancestors, the ancient government in the church and state was restored. The presbyterians soon felt the iron hand of power, and all dissenters from the episcopal worship were treated on the same intolerant principles. Their liberty was taken away, and their meetings were punished as seditious.

Mr. Biddle endeavoured to avoid the threatening storm, by restraining himself from public to more private assemblies. But his prudence and
caution

caution were ineffectual. The retired and peaceable associations of himself and his adherents could not elude the jealous eye of magistracy by their secrecy, nor disarm its rage by their harmlessness. For, on the first of June, 1662, he was haled from his lodgings, where he and some few of his friends were met for divine worship, and carried before sir Richard Brown, a justice of peace, who committed them all to prison, without admitting them to bail. Mr. Biddle was doomed to the dungeon, where he lay for five hours. The recorder, actuated by more reverence for the law, released them on giving security for answering, at the next sessions, to the charge brought against them. They accordingly performed this. But the court not being able to find any statute whereon to form a criminal indictment, they were referred to the following sessions, and then were proceeded against, under pretence of an offence at common law; a mode of conviction which leaves much to the breast of the judge. The decision, in this case, was, that every one of the hearers should be fined in the penalty of twenty pounds, and Mr. Biddle himself in one hundred; and they were ordered to lie in prison till these mulcts were paid.

The sheriff was disposed to have remitted the greatest part of Mr. Biddle's penalty, and to have accepted even ten pounds, which he would have

paid.

paid. Sir Richard Brown rigorously insisted upon the payment of the full sum, and even, in that case, threatened him with a seven years imprisonment, which occasioned his continuing in prison.

But in less than five weeks, through the noisomeness of the place, and the want of air, which was peculiarly disagreeable and pernicious to him, whose only recreation and exercise had been, for many years, to walk daily in the fresh air, he contracted a disease which was attended with immediate danger to his life. So unrelenting, so unpitying is bigotry, sir R. Brown could not be moved, in this extremity, to grant the sick prisoner the comfort of a removal, in order to recovery. The sheriff, whose name was Meynel, acted on the principles of humanity, and granted it. But, on the second day after, between five and six o'clock in the morning, the 22d of September, 1662, he died, in the 47th year of his age.

He had formerly assured his friends, that he had brought himself, by frequent meditations on the resurrection and future happiness, to look on death with contempt. The manner with which he met his dissolution, evinced to them the truth of these declarations. For when, by the disease more violently affecting his head, he perceived a great alteration, he signified it to his friends, and
absolutely

absolutely declined any further discourse; but composed himself, as it were to sleep, for eight hours before he expired, being very sparing of words, and even of groans, that might argue any impatience. When a pious person, who attended him, broke forth into this valedictory wish, *God grant that we may see one another in the kingdom of heaven*; his speech failing him, he shewed how pleasing that wish was to him, by lifting up his quivering hand. He had, before this illness, frequently dropped expressions, that indicated an expectation of his approaching end; often saying, that if he should be once more cast into prison, he should never be restored to liberty; and moreover, *That the work was done*, meaning, that the truth which he apprehended God had raised him up to profess, was sufficiently brought to light, and that there only wanted ingenuosness in men, for the embracing and acknowledging it.*

* Short account of his life, p. 9.

SECTION XI.

His Works, not noticed before.

It has been our design, in the preceding sections, to bring into view only those works of Mr. Biddle, which raised the public attention, or drew on himself severe prosecutions. But, besides these, there were other publications of his, which were specimens of his learning and genius, or expressive of his zeal to promote religious inquiry and truth. His juvenile performances have been before mentioned.

During his banishment to the isle of Scilly, as we have said, he drew up an essay to the explaining of the revelations; in which he treated of the beast in the apocalypse, antichrist, the personal reign of Christ on the earth, &c. * His present biographer not having been able to procure a sight of this piece, can say nothing more concerning it.

* Short account of his life, p. 4. and British biography, 8vo. vol. vi. p. 79; note (1) and p. 87.

In the year 1653, Mr. Biddle published several small pieces, which were translations of tracts written by some of the polish unitarians. Among these was one entitled *Brevis discussio*; or a *Brief inquiry touching a better way than is commonly made use of to refute PAPISTS*, and reduce PROTESTANTS to a *certainly and unity in RELIGION*. The author of this tract was Joachim Stegman, a german, who, on account of his attachment to the focinian sentiments, was dismissed from the pastoral office in two churches of the reformed; on which he went into Poland, and was first chosen principal of the univerfity at Racow, and was then fent, by the fynod of Racow, to fucceed Valentinus Radecius, as pastor of the unitarian church at Claudiopolis, or, as it is called in German, Clausenburg, in Saxony, where he died in 1633.*

This work was printed in 1633: a translation of it is preferved in the Phœnix. It incurred censure, as containing fundry focinian and pelagian tenets, and was afcribed to Mr. John Hales, of Eton.

“ The fcope of it is to fhew, that the proteftants, by adhering to the peculiar fyftem of Lu-]

* Bock *Historia antitrinitariorum*, tom. i. p. ii. p. 949, 950, et Sandii *Bibliotheca antitrin.* p. 132.

ther,

ther, Brentius, Calvin, Beza, &c. &c. had, in many instances, offered weak and improper arguments against popery, which had laid them under needless difficulties. His advice is, therefore, to discard all human authority, and to stick to the scripture only, as explained and understood by right reason, without having any regard to tradition, or the authority of fathers, councils, &c.

“ Mr. Bayle, we are told, says, this book did more hurt than good, not because it was not well written, but because it tended to disparage the reputation of the first reformers, broke in upon their several systems, and, what was worse than all the rest, was manifestly the work of somebody tainted with the heresies of Socinus and Arminius.” *

We suppose that Mr. Bayle speaks here not his own opinion, but the sentiments of those who prefer the party they have once espoused to good sense and truth. The piece opens with this principle; “ He that will refute an error, must neither be entangled in the same, nor reject the true grounds of refutations.” In the succeeding chapters it treats of fathers and doctors; of the holy spirit; of the true opinion touching the judge;

* An historical view of the controversy concerning an intermediate state. 2d ed. p. 64.

of traditions ; of philosophical principles ; of the true opinion touching the rule ; whether the dead do properly live ; whether Christ in heaven hath yet flesh and blood ; whether it be possible to obey the precepts of Christ ; and whether it be necessary to obey the precepts of Christ.

The eighth chapter of this work may be deemed curious, not only for the example it gives of the support which popery derives from some doctrines embraced by protestants ; but for the full and yet concise view which it exhibits of the arguments against an established doctrine, on which few, even in the present day, venture to think with freedom. “ Luther and Calvin,” he observes, “ teach such things as are injuriously defended, not only against the papists, but also against the very life of the christian religion, true piety. Of the former sort, is that opinion wherein they hold that the dead live. It will seem absurd, and indeed the thing itself is very absurd ; yet they believe it.

“ For they suppose that the souls of men, in that very moment wherein they are parted from their bodies by death, are carried either to heaven, and do there feel heavenly joy, and possess all kinds of happiness which God hath promised to his people ; or to hell, and are there tormented, and excruciated with unquenchable fire. And this,

this, as was said before, they attribute to the mere souls separated from the bodies, even before the resurrection of the men themselves, that is to say, while they are yet dead. But these things cannot happen to any thing which is not alive, for that which doth not live, doth not feel; and consequently neither enjoyeth pleasure, nor endureth pain. Wherefore they believe, in effect, that the dead live; namely, in the same manner that they affirm Peter, Paul, and other dead men, to live in heaven.

“ Now this is the foundation, not only of purgatory, but also of that horrible idolatry practised amongst the papists, whilst they invoke the saints that are dead. Take this away, and there will be no place left for the others. To what purpose is the fire of purgatory, if souls separated from the body feel nothing? to what purpose are prayers to the virgin Mary, to Peter, and to Paul, and other dead men, if they can neither hear prayers, nor intercede for you? On the contrary, if you admit this, you cannot easily overthrow the invocation of saints. Now, though the thing be such of itself, as deserves to seem absurd to every one, yet will we see, whether the contrary thereof be not set down in the scripture.

“ Nor need we go far for an example, since we have a pregnant one in the argument of Christ, wherein

wherein he proveth the future resurrection of the dead from thence; that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but is not the God of the dead, but of the living; whence he concludeth that they live to God, that is, shall be recalled to life by God, that he may manifest himself to be their God, or benefactor. This argument would be fallacious, if before the resurrection they felt heavenly joy. For then God would be their God or benefactor, namely, according to their souls, although their body should never rise again.

“ In like manner, the reasoning of the apostle would be fallacious, 1 Cor. xv. 30, 31, 32. wherein he proveth the resurrection by that argument; because, otherwise, those that believe in Christ would in vain seek hazards every hour; in vain suffer so many calamities for Christ, which he teacheth by his own example. Again, because otherwise it would be better to sing the song of the epicureans, “ Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.” In short, of all men, christians would be the most miserable. Certainly this would be false, if the godly, presently after death, did in their souls enjoy celestial happiness, and the wicked feel torment. For they would not in vain suffer calamities, nor these follow the pleasures,

pleasures of the flesh scotfree. And the godly would be far happier than the wicked.

“ Since, therefore, it is the absurdest thing in the world, to say that Christ and the apostle Paul did not argue rightly; is it not clear that the doctrine is false, which being granted, so great an absurdity would be charged on Christ and the apostle Paul?

“ Furthermore, why should Peter defer the salvation of souls to the last day, 1 Pet. i. 5. *who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time;* and Paul the crown of righteousness to the day of judgment; 2 Tim. iv. 8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day, &c.?* To what purpose should the judgment be appointed? How could it be said of the godly, under the old covenant, that they received not the promise, *God providing some better things for us, that they might not without us be made perfect;* Heb. xi. 40. if the soul of every one presently after death, even without the body, felt celestial happiness?

“ But the very nature of the thing itself refuseth it. Is not living, dying, feeling, hearing, acting, proper to the whole man, or the compound

pound

pound of soul and body? Is not the body the instrument of the soul, without which it cannot perform her functions; as an artist knoweth indeed the art of working, but unless he have instruments at hand, he cannot produce any effect? Let the eye be shut, the soul will not see, though the power of seeing be not taken away from it. For as soon as you shall restore the instruments, a man will presently see. Wherefore souls separated from bodies are neither dead nor live, and consequently enjoy no pleasure, and feel no pain. For those things are proper to the whole compound.

“ But the scripture saith, that the dead are not, that the spirit returneth to him that gave it; and of the spirits of the godly, that they are in the hand of God, but at the resurrection they shall be joined with the bodies; and then, having gotten instruments, they will put forth their operations.”

The translation of this piece of Stegman's is attended with a short preface, in which Mr. Biddle, besides passing encomiums on the work, chiefly labours to obviate an objection that might be urged against it, from the stress it lays on the use of reason in religion. The remarks, which Mr. Biddle offers on this point, are worthy of attention.

Speaking of those who would be displeased with it, because reason is therein much cried up; he says, " My desire therefore is, that such persons would but consider what the holy scripture itself saith on this behalf; namely, how Paul, Rom. xii. 1. calleth the service which christians are to exhibit unto God, a *rational* or *reasonable service*. And Peter, 1 Ep. ii. 2. stileth the word of the gospel which he preached, *sincere rational milk* (for so the original hath it, as any one who is skilled in that tongue, and looketh into the greek context, may perceive). And ch. iii. 15. he saith, *Be ready always to make an apology unto every one that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*. Which passage clearly intimateth, that as there is no incongruity for others to require a *reason* of our hope in Christ, so we christians are, above all other professors whatsoever, obliged to be very *rational*; for to make an apology or defence in the behalf of so abstruse and sublime a doctrine as ours is, requireth a more than ordinary improvement of *reason*.

" This being so, it may seem strange why so great a number even of *protestant* ministers should make *reason* a common theme to disclaim against, giving to it (without warrant of scripture) the name of *corrupt reason* and *carnal reason*, and others the like eulogies. But the truth is, they
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themselves hold many absurd, ridiculous, and *unreasonable* opinions, and so know right well, that if men once begin to make use of their *reason*, and bring the doctrines, that are commonly taught, to the touchstone of the scripture, explained and managed in a rational way, their tenets and reputation with the people will be soon laid in the dust. Let such ministers henceforward either leave off clamouring against *reason*, or no more open their mouths against papists, and their opinion about transubstantiation; for whosoever shall sift the controversy between *papists* and *protestants*, concerning it, shall find that the principal, if not only ground why we reject it, is because it is repugnant to *reason*. But if transubstantiation is to be disclaimed, because contrary to *reason*, why shall not all other *unreasonable* doctrines, upon the same account, be exploded, especially seeing there is scarce any one of them can plead so plausible a colour of scripture for itself as that can?"

Another piece, translated by Mr. Biddle, was Przypcovius's Life of Faustus Socinus; with the preliminary discourse prefixed by that writer to the works of Socinus. The title of the tract is, "*The LIFE of that incomparable man, FAUSTUS SOCINUS SENENSIS, described by a Polonian knight. Whereunto is added, an excellent Discourse which the same author would have had premised to the*

works of Socinus; together with a catalogue of *those works*. The views of Mr. Biddle, in this publication, appear to have been truly laudable and liberal, viz. to do justice to a character which had been much aspersed, and to hold up, to contemplation, a great example; at the same time that he enters a caveat against an implicit deference to the judgment of his hero.

“ The life of Socinus, he says in his preface, is here exposed to thy view, that by the perusal thereof thou mayest receive certain information concerning the man, whom ministers and others traduce by custom; having (for the most part) never heard any thing of his conversation, nor seen any of his works; or, if they have, they were either unable or unwilling to make a thorough scrutiny into them, and so no marvel, if they speak evil of him.

“ To say any thing of him here, by way of eulogy, as that he was one of the most pregnant wits that the world hath produced; that none, since the apostles, hath deserved better of our religion, in that the lord Christ hath chiefly made use of his ministry to retrieve so many precious truths of the gospel, which had a long time been hidden from the eyes of men by the artifice of Satan; that he shewed the world a more accurate way to discuss controversies in religion, and to
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fetch out the very marrow of the holy scripture, so that a man may more avail himself by reading his works, than perhaps by perusing all the fathers, together with the writings of more modern authors; that the virtues of his will were not inferior unto those of his understanding, he being every way furnished to the work of the Lord; that he opened the right way to bring christians to the unity of the faith, and acknowledgment of the son of God; that he took the same course to propagate the gospel, that Christ and the apostles had done before him, forsaking his estate and his nearest relations, and undergoing all manner of labours and hazards, to draw men to the knowledge of the truth; that he had no other end of all his undertakings, than the glory of God and Christ, and the salvation of himself and others, it being impossible for calumny itself, with any colour, to asperse him with the least suspicion of worldly interest; that he of all interpreters explaineth the precepts of Christ in the strictest manner, and windeth up the lives of men to the highest strain of holiness; to say the other like things (though in themselves true and certain) would, notwithstanding, here be impertinent, in that it would forestall what the polonian knight hath written on this subject.

“ To him, therefore, I refer thee, desiring thee to read his words without prejudice, and then the works of Socinus himself; and though thou beest not thereby convinced that all which Socinus taught is true, (for neither am I myself of that belief, as having discovered that in some lesser things Socinus, as a man, went awry, however, in the main, he hit the truth) yet for so much of Christ as thou must needs confess appeareth in him, begin to have more favourable thoughts of him and his followers.”

In addition to these pieces, which were translations from polish unitarian writers, we should add another tract by the knight, who was the author of the former,* viz. *Dissertatio de pace, &c. Or, a DISCOURSE touching the PEACE and CONCORD of the CHURCH. Wherein is elegantly and acutely argued, that not so much a bad opinion, as a bad life, excludes a christian out of the kingdom of heaven; and that the things necessary to be known for the attainment of salvation, are very few and easy; and finally, that those who pass amongst us under the name of heretics, are notwithstanding to be tolerated.* This piece, written when the author was little more than eighteen

* For an account of Przipeovius, we refer to the Memoirs of the life, &c. of Faustus Socinus, p. 439—452.

years old, had the honour of being ascribed to Episcopus. The composition is insinuating and masterly. The design of it was liberal, and, considering that the author did not agree, in their discriminating opinion, with those on whose behalf he wrote, it was peculiarly expressive of generosity and candor. His view was to moderate the zeal and bitterness, of which the socinians were, in general, the unmerited objects. To effect this purpose, it was introduced with some reflexions on the lot of truth and innocence in this world. In some following chapters is shewn, what things concerning God and Christ are necessary to be known unto salvation, and what are the parts of true faith; that sincere love towards God and Christ is sufficient to salvation, and that the same may be in those who err; that though faith and the holy spirit be the gifts of God, yet erring persons have and may have them; that nothing but disobedience and unbelief exclude a man from eternal salvation; and that such as err, are free from these; that the things necessary to be known unto salvation are few and very simple, and easy to be understood by the simplest; such is not the common doctrine concerning the trinity; that there is not in this life a perfect knowledge of God, and of divine mysteries, but in the other life; and that faith, hope, and charity are sufficient

cient to salvation. The discussion of these points is followed with a general apology for socinians on this principle, that they are not of such a persuasion out of ambition, avarice, pleasure, or superstition, nor offend out of any malice, but only out of the care of their salvation. Then follows an answer to the objection, drawn from their rejecting the consent of the church, and resting the defence of their opinion upon the authority of scripture only. This is succeeded by an answer to three other objections, with a comparison of Calvin's doctrine on predestination, with the doctrine of others. Then some particular reasons for tolerating heretics are offered; and the question, who are heretics, is considered. The tract concludes with an inquiry, what heretics are to be excommunicated, and what not, and with a fuller apology for those who in that age passed as such.

Mr. Biddle's preface, which is a short one, concludes with that serious and just exhortation, formed on the most enlarged principles, which we have quoted, p. 11 and 12.

Large and numerous quotations from this work might be deemed tedious, and superseded by modern publications on the side of candor and moderation. But a passage or two, it is hoped, will not be unacceptable to the reader. To a prejudice imbibed against the socinian sentiment concerning

cerning the person of Christ, as what must be highly displeasing to him, because derogatory from his glory, the author answers thus: " The greatest part of them, who at this day recede from the common sense of the church in so great a matter, are not out of any rashness so persuaded, touching the son of God, but rather out of a pious fear, lest they should detract from the Father somewhat of his honour. Wherein, if they unwittingly offend against the son, out of love to the Father, (so that improbity mingle not itself with their error) it seemeth very credible, that the son will, for the very love of the Father, forgive them this error. For he gave a notable proof of his meekness, when he prayed for his ignorant murderers. What, think we, will not he do for the love of the Father, who, for the love of men, forgave so great an injury to his enemies? Now if he, out of love to mankind, doubted not to assume the form of a servant, and really to endure extreme disgraces, certainly he will bear with the errors of men, who do not conceive worthily enough of his majesty and dignity, especially that which is past. Will he, who for the sake of men, did, of his own accord, debase himself to the lowest condition, punish them for this very thing, namely, because they out of ignorance, think more meanly of his condition than

than is fit; especially when he himself, by his debasement, did in a manner give an occasion of such ignorance? Certainly it is incredible, that he, who of his own accord underwent, for the sins of men, a reproachful kind of death, will not pardon to human weakness, a simple opinion that derogates something from his ancient excellence, if so be the error be harmless, and be removed from all sin of malice."

Another passage, in which he endeavours to remove the objection against an indulgence to those who hold certain opinions, drawn from the fear, that the interest of truth will suffer by the favour shewn to the erroneous, deserves to be quoted. "If," saith he, "we be afraid of the contagion of such errors, either in behalf of ourselves, or rather of the weaker ones, in the first place we may not thereupon renounce brotherly love, which we owe to them, although they err. For we ought not to forsake a certain and clear duty, lest an uncertain evil should happen, nor to pursue even the most holy ends by unlawful means. But, secondly, that fear is vain. For if we have not the truth, there is little danger to be feared from them, much less if we have it. For since they maintain their tenets with no arms, nor with any force, and think it not so much as lawful so to do, nor set them off with any carnal allurements,

ments, certainly the truth can never be by them either oppressed with force, or overthrown with fraud, inasmuch as the nature of truth is such, that, like to eagles feathers, she devoureth all other light plumage of opinions, never withdrawing herself from us, unless she be tired either with our servitude, or sins. Which twain being not to be feared by us in a modest liberty of dissenting, and study of true charity, what cause is there why we should so warily fence our opinions from their tenets?

“ Let us rather be possessed with a certain hope, that as earthen vessels being joined with those of tin or silver, are broken to pieces; so also if God, the author of peace, shall bring back into the church that happy tolerance, all false opinions fighting hand to hand with the true, will be dashed to shivers, and perish. Otherwise, if we so much fear that mutual patience and friendly conference, we do not think well enough concerning the goodness of our cause.

“ Heretofore, when the dawning of gospel-light was returned, Luther and his followers would have wished that they might be tolerated in the communion of the roman church. But it concerned the pope to secure his darkness from the approach of the morning. Again, when a dissension was risen up between the lutherans and the

the reformed, who was it that refused the form of agreement that was offered, but he that doubted of his cause? Now also in the very reformed church itself, upon the dissension concerning fate, none are more displeased with tolerance, than they that suspect the truth of this doctrine. Would error were so circumspect in the cradle of its infancy, as it is provident being once grown up. But it being blind when it is born, doth afterward become sharp-sighted, foreseeing its fate afar off, and eschewing it, and is never more ingenious to prolong its life, than when it is pressed with the conscience of its own weakness."

In aid of the design and reasonings of this tract, Mr. Biddle added a postscript; in which, among other reflexions, are the following pertinent remarks and close appeals to those who, arrogating to themselves the character of the orthodox, censure all others as heretics.

Mr. Biddle granting, that he who contradicts the divine writings of the apostles, should be no less esteemed an heretic, than he who opposed the apostle's preaching by word of mouth, adds, "but even thus can we not challenge that censorian rod against heretics, (referring to certain particular passages in the epistles.) For they whom ye place in the rank of heretics, are so far from contradicting the holy scripture, that they
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wage war against you out of the same, and appeal to the judgment thereof, not without a certain hope of victory, in the examination of their cause; inasmuch as they embrace the scripture in all things, with as great veneration of mind as you do; nor amongst all the christian churches, which are at this day extant, shall ye shew any one (that I know of) which doth not religiously, and from the heart, yield an undoubted assent to all those things, that are proposed and taught in the holy scripture. Wherefore, there is no cause why ye should condemn any one of them for heresy, since they agree with you in giving due credence to the sacred writ. And, therefore, whatsoever pretence ye seek for your carnal zeal against such as you call heretics, yet to indifferent judgments can no other ground hereof appear, than their dissent from your interpretation of the holy scripture, as to the controverted doctrines.

“ But I will here bountifully grant you, that ye have in all things hit the true sense of the scripture, and defend it. Nevertheless, it is further requisite, that ye make this plain to them, whom ye brand with the crime of heresy. But what here is the stress of your arguments? Ye appeal again to the holy scripture, and from thence condemn heretics. But they have already stricken this weapon out of your hands, shewing

that the holy scripture maketh for you, only in your own sense and interpretation, and that they are accordingly condemned by you, not from the sacred scripture, but from your interpretation of the sacred scripture. And this is the circle of your arguing, which they deservedly reject.

“ Draw out, therefore, against heretics those truly apostolical weapons, not the *thrasenical* prating of the chair in the university, but the power of the holy spirit, wherewith the apostles being indued, could deliver blasphemers to satan, 1 Tim. i. 10. and slay hypocrites with the speaking of a word, Acts v. If ye want the powerful efficacy of this spirit, acknowledge your rashness and iniquity in condemning them, to whom ye are not able, with evident and sufficient arguments to demonstrate your interpretation of the holy scripture, and who by the same right, and from the same foundation, object to you not only errors, but also heresies.

“ Ye know that of Christ, *condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.* What account will you give to this just judge, for so often violating this precept? Your zeal of the divine glory will not then excuse you; for though it palliate itself under this reverend name, yet is it wholly of the flesh, and odious to God. But if ye affirm, that it proceedeth from the holy spirit, produce arguments

ments worthy of so great an author. For neither is this spirit so weak, but that he can shew forth tokens of his divine authority and presence in his ministers, and by them against his enemies. But whither am I carried away? I beseech thee, good reader, to pardon this digression of mine; and having liked the pious counsel of our author, intreat God that he would instil into other readers also a mind studious of peace and concord."

Such sentiments are so important and liberal, that they can scarcely be repeated too often, or be presented in too various forms. For every representation, whether in a modern or ancient dress, carries a recommendation of them to every candid mind, and it may be presumed, will not be wholly without effect in making them to be known, approved and felt.

SECTION XII.

His Character.

WE have traced Mr. Biddle through the labours, &c. of a studious, and the events of an afflicted life. His studies were devoted to the

pursuit of religious knowledge, and his sufferings were incurred by a conscientious adherence to the convictions which his inquiries produced. From both, the reader will form his own ideas concerning his abilities, learning and character. They were all held in high estimation by those who personally knew him, and were acknowledged by his enemies.

His acquaintance with the holy scriptures, as was observed in the second section, was singularly comprehensive and exact. His knowledge of them was instead of a concordance, for no part could be named, but he would presently cite the book, chapter, and verse. This perfect knowledge in the scriptures, joined with an happy and ready memory, whereby he had, at recollection, what he had read in other authors, gave him a great advantage in all debates, of which, without the least ostentation, he availed himself.

The distinguishing point of view, under which the preceding account exhibits him, is that of a REFORMER, and a sufferer for conscience sake : yet, in the former character, he appears to have been modest and candid, and in the latter patient and resigned. “ It was,” says his biographer, who appears to have been intimately acquainted with him, “ in his heart to promote piety, and he had no design to aggrandise his name by opposition

sition to common doctrines. Indeed, he was a great asserter of common doctrines against novel opinions, that tended either to sedition, libertinism, or superstition. And in what he held contrary to the current, he did not endeavour to tie those he had won, to be of his mind in such a society, and by such a society, and by such bands, as might continue them a successive party, bearing his name as their founder; but left them to all that liberty, which the duty of owning the truth according to their conscience, and of mutual edification, would allow them*."

Zealous and active as Mr. Biddle was in promoting what he deemed great and important truth, he was still more zealous in promoting holiness of life and manners; for this was always his end and design in what he taught. "He valued not his doctrines for speculation, but practice, insomuch that he would not discourse of those points wherein he differed from others, with those that appeared not religious, according to knowledge. Neither could he bear those that dissembled in profession, for worldly interests."

His own life was pure and irreproachable. Mr. Anthony Wood acknowledges, that, "ex-

* Short account of his life, p. 10.

cept his opinions, there was little or nothing blame-worthy in him." He was so free from being questioned for any the least blemish in his life, that one of his advocates says, " the informers themselves, who brought on the last prosecution against him, had been heard to admire his strict exemplary life, full of modesty, sobriety, and forbearance, no ways contentious, touching the great things of the world; but altogether taken up with the great things of God, revealed in the holy scriptures*."

Another writer, on the proceedings against him, gives this testimony to his conversation. " We have," says he, " had intimate knowledge thereof for some years; but we think he needs not us, but may appeal even to his enemies, for his vindication therein. Let those that knew him at Oxford for the space of seven or eight years, those that knew him at Gloucester about three years, those that knew him at London these eight or nine years, (most of which he hath been a prisoner) speak what they know, of unrighteousness, uncleanness, unpeaceableness, malice, pride, profaneness, drunkenness, or any the like iniquity, which they can accuse him of, or hath

* Short account of his life, p. 10.

he, (as the manner of heretics is) 2 Pet. 2. 3. *through covetousness, with feigned words, made merchandise of any?* Hath he not herein walked upon such true grounds of christian self-denial, that none in the world can stand more clear and blameless herein also? He having shunned to make any of those advantages which are easily made in the world, by men of his parts and breeding, languages, and learning, that (if any known to us) he may truly say as the apostle, *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities; he ever accounting it a more blessed thing to give, than to receive*.*"

It is a proof of the great and serious regard which he had for universal righteousness, that "he would often tell his friends, that no religion could benefit a bad man; and call upon them to resolve with themselves, as well to profess and practise the truth that is according to godliness, as to study to find it out, and that against all terrors and allurements to the contrary; being assured that nothing displeasing to almighty God, would be any wise profitable to them †. The probity of his

* CROSBY'S History of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 210, 211, 212.

† Short account of his life, p. 10.

own conduct was eminently conspicuous : so that the appeal was made to many persons of worth and credit in London, on the justice and integrity of his heart, and on his holy care not to dissemble, play the hypocrite, or deal fraudulently with any, not even to save his life *.

The foundation of his moral excellencies was laid, where the foundation of every good attainment must be laid, in the application of the earliest years to the pursuit of divine wisdom. Before he left school, there was discovered in him " a singular piety of mind, and contempt of secular affairs : " he applied himself to the study of virtue, together with the study of literature and science : and, in his younger years, was an amiable example of filial affection to his mother, to whom, becoming a widow by the death of his father, he, with great diligence, gave dutiful assistance †.

The events, which we have surveyed, furnish a striking proof of the perseverance and fortitude, with which he followed truth, and met his sufferings. And, though he was conversant in the discussion of points, involved, by the inventions of men, and a mixture of human science, in great difficulties and obscurity, yet it doth not appear,

* Crosby's history of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 210, 211.

† Short account of his life, p. 4.

that he contended therein out of curiosity, vain-glory, and self-conceit; but with great humility and courtesy: "for they who differed from him, how mean soever, could not oblige him more, than by pertinent objections, soberly urged, to give him the opportunity of resolving them: which he always did with great simplicity and plainness of speech, without any ostentation of learning*."

His conversation was as remote from covetousness, as it was free from ambition. For, when he was capable of doing it, he supported himself by his own industry, and refused the supplies, which benevolence and friendship offered him; unless, when the necessities, brought on by imprisonment, sickness, and the like calamities, constrained him to avail himself of the kindness of others. After a seven years' confinement, he was prevailed with to accept of a bed and board from a friendly citizen in London†: and the importunities of another induced him to do the same, after his return from exile in the isle of Scilly. But these were exceptions to his general mode of ministering himself to his wants.

* Short account of his life, p. 10. and Crosby's History of the baptists, vol. i. p. 214.

† Mr. Firmin.

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He had learned to be content with a little; and sought not more: nay, out of that little he would contribute to the necessities of others. His gratifications were very moderate, for he was remarkably temperate in eating, as well as in drinking. The purity of his character was not only most fair and unblamable; but, to avoid the least suspicion, he carried his reserve in his behaviour to the female sex, to an unusual (it may be called an extravagant) degree of delicacy and caution.

He was careful to preserve justice in his dealings towards men, and was solicitous to enforce and exemplify this virtue, and that of charity, as, in his opinion, essentially necessary to salvation. And he had such a lively sense of the obligations of humanity and kindness, that it was one of his lessons, which Mr. Firmin learnt of him, not only to relieve, but to visit the sick and poor, as the best means of administering comfort to them, and of gaining an exact knowledge of their circumstances; and as affording an opportunity to assist them by our counsel, or our interest, more effectually than by the charity we do or can bestow upon them *.

There is another ingredient in a good and excellent character, viz. reverent, humble piety,

* The life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, 1698, p. 10. reprinted 1791, p. 8.

which

which deserves particular mention in the delineation of Mr. Biddle's. "The virtues of the devotional kind, observes a great writer, may be shewn by arguments independent of the peculiar doctrines of revelation, to be, in their own nature, the most truly valuable, as well as the most sublime of all others, and to form what may be called the key-stone of every truly great and heroic character †." The piety of Mr. Biddle was eminent. "He was, his biographer tells us, a strict observer himself, and a severe exactor in others, of reverence in speaking of God and Christ, and holy things: so that he would by no means hear their names, or any sentence of holy scripture, used vainly or lightly, much less any foolish talking, or scurrility." While he treated sacred subjects with this reverence and gravity, he would be chearful and pleasant, and like well that the company should be so too. "Yet even in his common converse, he always retained an awe of the divine presence, and was sometimes observed to lift up his hand suddenly; which those that were intimate with him, knew to be an effect of a secret ejaculation. But in his closet devotions, he was wont often to prostrate himself upon the

† Prieſtley's Letters to a philosophical unbeliever, part 1, p. 211.

ground, after the manner of our Saviour in his agony, and would commend that posture also to his most intimate friends *."

It is a pertinent remark made on the excellent character, which Mr. Biddle supported, that the unitarians who suffered in our country, were all of them eminent examples of piety and virtue †. It is of consequence, on every occasion that offers, to point out this; not only, as a good example can never be exhibited to view, without doing honour to religion, and leaving some good impressions on the mind;---but also to obviate the prejudices of some, even good men, who can scarcely be induced to suppose that true piety can exist, where, what they deem, great and fundamental errors, are embraced. They have been so accustomed to blend their own peculiar ideas and phraseology, with all their meditations on the divine being, to incorporate them with all their devout addresses to him, that they cannot conceive, how devotion can exist but under such a garb, or piety be felt but with the associations, with which they always feel it. But such persons only prove by this, how limited is their acquaintance with

* Short account of his life, p. 11.

† Mr. Lindsey's Historical view of the state of the unitarian doctrine, p. 303.

human characters, and how narrow are their own views of things. The principles which are the great grounds of devout affections, are common to all religious schemes: such as that *God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him: that he hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in, or by, his son* Christ Jesus. Into these principles may, and must, all the sentiments and exercises of a pious mind be resolved, as their just cause and animating motive. To a benevolent mind it is a source of joyful reflection to believe, that the power and pleasure of these principles are, and must be, felt by every sincere christian, whether calvinist or arminian; whether athanasian, arian, or socinian. The lover of truth, especially of religious truth, cannot but possess a serious and devout mind: for he is conversant with the most serious subjects, and from them only can derive his support and consolation under the discouragements and evils to which his inquiries after truth may expose him. And if trinitarians can mention a Howe, a Baxter, and a Watts; anti-trinitarians can boast an Emlyn, and Abernethy, and a Lardner.

SECTION XIII.

Conclusion—Some general reflections on Mr. Biddle's character—and on the utility of religious controversy.

SOME will be ready to hold the labours and character of Mr. Biddle, which we have represented, in low estimation : as distinguished chiefly by an excessive attachment to religious controversy. But the neglect or indifference, with which they themselves treat the discussion of theological questions, is not a fair and just standard by which to judge of those whose attention, like Mr. Biddle's, hath been directed to them : for how can they be supposed competent to the determination of a point, on which they have bestowed no pains ? All that their opinion of its value proves, is only that such a direction of the thoughts and studies does not suit their taste. But still, in the great circle of human actions and pursuits, it may have its peculiar importance and use.

It will not be denied, that the discovery of truth, mathematical or philosophical, is a suitable and valuable employment of the rational powers : and though it be not necessary for the good of the world, that every man should be a philosopher or
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mathematician, yet mankind are greatly indebted to the labours, and ought to hold in high esteem the names, of those who have devoted their time and thoughts to such investigations: which, in innumerable instances, are capable of being improved, and have been actually improved, to the advantage of mankind.

Why should its due value and praise be denied to the investigation of religious truth? This hath a more extensive influence, than scientific: it hath a more intimate connexion with human conduct, in all the intercourse, and with human felicity, under all the events of life. This derives a peculiar importance, from the energy it possesseth, to form a moral character; to meliorate the whole human race in this world; and to train up individuals, who yield to its power, for eternal PERFECTION and happiness.

The revelation of religious truth, first by Moses and the prophets, and then by Jesus Christ, is a most striking and convincing argument of its value and importance. Being revealed from heaven, it becomes an object of sacred attention to all, to whom it hath been communicated. There is a merit in the improvement of any talent, in the fulfilling of any obligation. On these plain principles, the investigation of religious truth hath merit:—the merit of attending to what

God hath imparted. Diligence and assiduity heighten this merit ; but sufferings endured in the pursuit and profession of it, add still more to it. Probity and integrity are inestimable in any course of life. Can they lose their value because the principle, which calls them into exertion, is the love of divine truth ?

Let these considerations be weighed ; they will assist us to appreciate the excellence and importance of such characters as Mr. Biddle. Such characters have been rendered peculiarly necessary and useful, through the gross corruptions, in which christianity hath been, for ages, almost lost. Without such exertions, such studies, and such sufferings, as mark the life of Mr. Biddle, no reformation from popery could have taken place, could have been supported and carried on. A Biddle, as hath been seen, calls the attention to important questions, throws light by discussion on interesting points, and awakens the spirit of inquiry and zeal.

In aid of these remarks, I am induced to produce the following reflexions. "Notwithstanding the disrespect which is occasionally shewn towards religious controversy, by little and illiberal minds, it is to such controversies as engaged the pens of Clarke, Hoadley and Sykes, that we owe much of what is most valuable and dear to us.

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An affected disparagement of the several controversies which have respected religious liberty, and the improved knowledge of the scriptures, generally indicates an indifference to the nature and obligations of religion itself, or bespeaks a total ignorance of the blessings we derive and enjoy from free inquiry and debate, by means of the press; or is the effect of a lamentable prejudice against every desire and attempt to bring all professing christians to abide by the plain and artless gospel of Christ; or, when such aversion to controversy is held by well-meaning and more candid minds, it is no other than their declaring their earnest desire to establish the *end*, while, at the same time, they inconsistently and peremptorily protest against the only *means* which can effect it*."

The sentiments of the learned bishop Pearce are very pertinent here, and deserve to be recited. "Let it be further considered," says his lordship, "that, if no disputes had ever been raised in the christian church, there is great reason to think, that less of truth would have been preserved."

* See the very instructive and entertaining Memoirs of the life and writings of Dr. Arthur Ashley Sykes, by D. Disney, p. 365.

in it, than there is to be found at present. Cicero tells us (Tusc. Disput. l. ii. cap. 2.) that philosophy would not have arrived at that height of credit, to which it arrived in Greece, if it had not received force and vigour from the controversies and disputes which were there carried on among the learned. And so it fares with religion: however good men may justly dislike the methods by which disputes about religious points are too often carried on, yet we see, that, in fact, ignorance of religion is no where so gross as where free debates about it are *not* allowed. And it is observable of the earlier and better ages of the church, that when heretics arose, and carried some doctrines to one extreme, it commonly was when the church seemed inclined to bear too much towards the other extreme. These heretics then, under the guidance of providence, caused a *revulsion of humours*, as it were, in the ecclesiastical body: it brought many back again into the right channel, and made them stick more closely to the truth than they would probably have done, if no opposition had been made. So that disputes about the christian religion seem to have contributed as much to the preserving it *pure*, as the constant motion of waters does to the keeping them *sweet*: and if so, that can be no argument *against believing*

lieving christianity, which has been one great cause of continuing it worthy to be believed *.

After all, it is perhaps more accurate to describe Mr. Biddle, after his biographer, as a *sincere reformer*, than a controversialist: for, besides publishing but a few books, he did not reply to those diverse answers, which were given to what he did publish. For this conduct several reasons have been given. "First, that he was verily persuaded, that truth being in itself plain and simple, especially what is necessary and very useful, is easy to be apprehended by few words: it is error that seeks garnish in many words and figures of speech. Again, what he did publish, he well deliberated of; so that he did not find in the adverse writings any thing of moment, which an attentive reader might not perceive already obviated; and they that attend not to the first propositions, will not receive benefit by replies and rejoinders. We add, that he, treading in a path, long overgrown with briars and thorns of error and sophistry, it required vastly greater labour and diligence to find out the way of truth, in which no Englishman had, by any appearing footsteps, gone before him for many ages †."

* Bp. Pearce's Sermons, vol. 1. p. 386, 387.

† Short account of his life, p. 9, 10.

To those who are convinced that, notwithstanding his mistakes in some points, Mr. Biddle had truth on his side in the great questions he discussed, concerning the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, it will be a painful reflexion, that his opinions have made but a very slow progress during these hundred and twenty years: at least the first hundred years of this period. The progress of truth is ever slow: for it has great difficulties to encounter from the indolence and interests of mankind; the discovery of it is attended with a painful process: light must be let into the minds of men by degrees: and many arguments must be, one after another, laid before them; and presented in different forms, and repeatedly renewed, before prejudices are subdued and conviction is produced. But to every sincere lover of God's truth this is a pleasing and encouraging thought: that it is **GREAT, and WILL IN THE END PREVAIL.**

In the mean time, it is the duty of every one to use his own best and faithful endeavours to come at the knowledge of it, and to promote it: "Let him," to use the words of the prelate just quoted, "be indifferent, if he will, to the knowledge of the several curious sciences, with which men of leisure wisely enough fill up the intervals of their time. Let him slight, if he will (though
I com-

I commend him not for it), the account of what history records concerning the past ages of the world, or what travellers or voyagers say concerning the distant parts of the earth. In all these things, his indifference, though not *praise-worthy*, is not *criminal*, is not *dangerous* to the health of his soul. But, when the question is, "How shall we worship God aright," (it may be as justly said, when it concerns the *object* of our worship) "How shall we please him? Upon what terms will he receive penitent sinners into favour?—Can it be wisdom? can it be common sense, not to make a diligent and impartial inquiry?—No man who finds his mind entangled with doubts and difficulties can be justified, if he neglect, as Pilate did, to know what the TRUTH is. It is his duty to search: it is his interest to do it; for the safety of his soul is highly concerned in it*."

* Ut supra, p. 388, 389.

T H E E N D.

I cannot give you for it, the account of what
history records concerning the past ages of the
world, or what travellers or voyagers have concern-
ing the different parts of the earth. In all these
things, his knowledge is not so extensive as that of
is not so extensive as that of the details of
the world, but when the question is, *we wish to
know the right way of doing things*, it is his
when it concerns the *art of our working*.
How shall we please him? Upon what terms
will he receive his service? Upon what terms
can it be withdrawn? can it be continued? can it
to make a diligent and impartial inquiry. No
man who finds his mind entangled with doubts
and difficulties can be satisfied, if he neglects, as
I have said to you, it is his duty to do it. For the

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* 21 supra, p. 388, 389.

THE END

